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IN THE LAND OF PEARL AND GOLD



ALEXANDER MACDONALD



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IN THE LAND OF
PEARL AND GOLD

The Modern Travel Series


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THE AUTHOR

IN THE LAND OF PEARL AND GOLD

A PIONEER'S WANDERINGS IN
THE BACK-BLOCKS AND PEARL-
ING GROUNDS OF AUSTRALIA
AND NEW GUINEA

BY

ALEXANDER MACDONALD

F.R.G.S.

AUTHOR OF "IN SEARCH OF ELDORADO,"

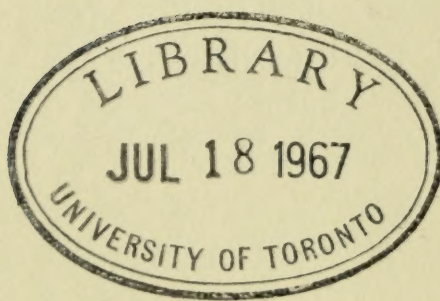
✓ "THE LOST EXPLORERS," ETC.

T. FISHER UNWIN

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TO
MY FATHER

PREFACE

THE experiences related in this book are fragmentary and do not necessarily follow consecutively. They could not be made to do so without a considerable amount of uninteresting explanation, as the scenes depicted in "In Search of Eldorado" are spread over the same period and chiefly in the same countries. These sketches, therefore, are only meant to be but little pictures that stand out in relief in my memory. They are complete in themselves, but in most cases supplement those contained in my previous travel volume.

A wanderer gathers many impressions. In swiftly changing scenes these possibly may be coloured somewhat, as the abruptness of the change does not allow time for his mind to become disassociated from what he may just previously have experienced. Things therefore often appear to him to be incongruous when they are not really so. He is always adaptable, however, and soon falls into line with his new environment. When writing of his adventures afterwards, the knowledge of later events, distance from the spots where they happened, and perhaps

present interests, may cause them to appear in a more or less distorted perspective, but sometimes, instead, a glamour is cast over them which exercises upon him an intense fascination, and almost compels him to revisit the scenes of his memory-cherished experiences.

I think the latter feeling is common to all wanderers, and as a result their writings—when they do write—may be tinged more or less, and somewhat story-like because they deal more with people than with geographical facts.

But a book of travel should be accurate, and I have always endeavoured to give my impression of things as at the time when the adventures actually occurred. Indeed most of the papers were written during my travels, and some of them are of very recent date. As a matter of fact, one or two of the adventures—the reader, with some trouble, may guess which—have not yet reached the conclusions which perhaps the last lines suggest. But hope ever leads.

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The Holding of Pelican Creek

AUSTRALIA of late years has been undergoing a course of development which is attracting the attention of the world. From her coastal cities and state capitals railways have been creeping steadily out on to the central desert, and very soon the vast mineral treasures of that inhospitable waste will be laid invitingly open to all.

It is strange how little really is known of Australia even by Australians, and to the average Briton the great Austral Land consists merely of Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane, Perth, a few—to him—unimportant grazing stations, and the gold-fields of Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie. Perhaps some may also have an idea that Ballarat of the early gold-rush days is now a large Victorian city, and that Geelong is another town somewhere near Melbourne; that Newcastle, Broken Hill, Goulbourn, and Bathurst are townships of some kind in New South Wales; that Toowoomba is a health resort about a hundred miles from Brisbane; and that gold comes from one or two mining camps in Queensland.

A comparatively short time ago this was all that was to be known, for the waterless interior was a land of mystery untrodden by white man. But the Unknown ever exercised a powerful fascination over the

Anglo-Saxon race, and when once the road over the coastal ranges became possible, some hardy pioneers, in search of fresh pasture for their stock, pushed out west, and farther west, and finally built Bourke, an isolated outpost on the Darling River. Far-seeing governments backed up the adventurers with railways, laid almost exactly in their tracks, and other towns sprang up along the line as it advanced. Expedition after expedition set out to explore the interior fastnesses from the various outposts now being formed throughout the country ; but it seemed as if the limit of country capable of bearing stock had been reached, for those who returned from most of these expeditions reported the near presence of a burnt-up desert shod with iron-stone boulders, over which it was next to impossible to travel, and which was infested with fierce unreasoning hordes of aborigines. The colonists, therefore, settled down to develop that which they already possessed, and incidentally to build up a Southern Empire, leaving the natives, reptiles, and innumerable pests to contend for the waterless tracts beyond.

At this point, however, another factor came into play in the development of Australia : a new race of men were springing up ; children of the soil were they in the true sense, reared in the " back-blocks," hardy, strong, and seasoned, and well fit to wage war with Nature for whatever that fickle dame had in her treasure-store.

The capitals on the coast were now ranking among the first - class cities of the British Empire ; but to the " back-blockers " they were only names such as London and Edinburgh. Similarly to the highly polished and sophisticated gentlemen who spent their

business hours in Pitt or George Street, Sydney, or Collin, Bourke, or Queen Street, Melbourne, the "back-blockers" were as a semi-savage tribe of people who had to be kept "out back" at any cost. But the men on the desert fringe neither knew nor cared what the city-bred people thought of them. They pursued their avocation—which as yet was that of rearing sheep—with a careless indifference, in strong contrast to the spasmodic fits of energetic "do something or burst" which occasionally seized them. At length the Westralian gold rushes startled the world, and reckless wanderers from all parts gravitated thither. Here the genuine back-blockers from the eastern colonies first fraternized with kindred spirits from over the seas and elsewhere, and as a result became fired with more ambition than they had had before. They alone were physically able to penetrate the gold-bearing desert from Southern Cross on to Coolgardie, thence to Kalgoorlie, Kanowna, and farther east. Railways followed, then capitalists and limited companies. The thirst for gold had now seized these sons of Australia—the early Victorian rushes were before their time—and as the powerful combinations of capital and machinery introduced from England and the other states drove them ever inwards, by making it impossible for men unaided to carry on gold-mining profitably where mechanical appliances existed, they spread north, south, and east, and soon the Westralian desert was marked like a huge gridiron by their tracks. In the east the same thing had already happened, although from a different cause. Long periods of drought had ruined most of the settlers; the banks had gone down, and altogether matters were very bad for both bush and city people. The back-blockers

were augmented by many of the best of the latter, and strange tales of fabulous fortunes made in fever-infested New Guinea, whither many had gone some time previously, instilled the belief among some that out in the heart of their own deserts lay fortunes for all. The reckless pioneering spirit, which has rolled back the confines of the British Empire to its present boundaries, now dominated these men, and soon the mystery of the *Terra Incognita* was solved. Prospecting parties crossed and re-crossed the country, suffering great hardships, but never despairing in their hopes of one day "striking it."

Often they found minerals they did not know, and frequently they discovered valuable gem-stones for which they could find no market. When any find was made of more than usual importance, the capitalists and the railway arrived soon after. Those fortunate enough to have good claims—and some who had not—sold out to the capitalist and retired no man knows where; the others packed up their swags again and moved on in disgust to look for more "shows."

Thus we arrive at the present time. The back-blocker has developed into an erratic wanderer with a horror of railways and a hope of one day stumbling across a nugget or winning a Tattersall's sweep. He sleeps where night finds him, and lives on a piece of half-cooked mutton and a chunk of damper. He is a sworn enemy to all capitalists, but would die before "going back on his mate," as he puts it. Meanwhile the whirl of machinery, the roar of the smelting furnace, and the thud of the crushing batteries resound where but a few years ago the aborigines held high corroboree.

Northern Queensland offers, perhaps, one of the best examples of recent mineral development. This is the land of copper, tin, wolfram, lead, silver, molybdenite, and a variety of other minerals, including, of course, gold, most of which are unknown to the warm-hearted, impulsive, but erratic individual who finds them. Gold was the mighty magnet which first drew humanity to this part of the world, and many and strange are the tales told round the camp fires by the old prospectors of the famous Palmer River Rush. In these tales the mists of time have cast a glamour over the early days of this field, and invariably the miner describes the life there as having been "glorious," and the three-sided battles which took place daily between the hated but energetic and enterprising Chinese, the bloodthirsty aborigines of the Cape York Peninsula, and themselves as "adventures." The annals of Queensland history, however, show that men died there like sheep in the drought season, fever raged, and pestilence was everywhere. The starving remnant of white men had to wage perpetual war against both the murderous natives and the more cunning yellow men, who did not hesitate to use the knife upon any poor being whom they found alone. But those times are gone. The Chinese still wash the sands of the Palmer, and the aborigines still wander about with spear, womerah, and boomerang, but the white man has, in his own language, "given it best." About the same time as the Palmer Rush some men found tin over the ranges from Cairns, and Herberton, the centre of the present tin-mining industry, sprang into existence. From Herberton men spread out westward, and copper in rich fissure lodes

was found, and then farther out the famous contact deposits of ore in the limestone country around what is now Chillagoe were discovered. Other minerals were soon found, and for a time the prospectors made money. But the railway followed, and then came the period of limited companies and syndicates, with the importation of practical miners from the southern states and elsewhere. So the pioneers rounded up their horses, packed their few belongings, and, with their deeply-furrowed faces towards the setting sun, moved on again.

The township of Chillagoe remained the farthest outlying point of the railway in this quarter for some time, and the big copper company of that name absorbed all the smaller "shows" in the vicinity. Then the steel track was pushed westward to Mungana, the present terminus, and from that township bush roads and bridle pads extend, like the spokes of a wheel, to the various camps of the still independent miners.

But time works marvellous changes in all things, and, to those who know the back-blockers, one of the strangest is the fact that he does not now look upon an organized company as of necessity his enemy. He has found that the wealthy combinations afford a very convenient market for his ore, and may even buy his "show" when it is no longer capable of being worked in primitive fashion at a profit. It has also dawned on him that when a large and prosperous company is at work near him, the value of his own property on the market increases in proportion to the success of his wealthy neighbour.

"We don't mind any darned company comin' out to do honest work so long as they come far enough

out," one grizzled old prospector said to the writer recently. "It is when they hang into the railway and force us to sell them our darned ore at their price, to bolster up their own crook concerns, that we kick. Let them come out an' live on damper, as we do, an' then those darned white-faced collar-an'-eye-glass Johnnies will have to stay at home with their mothers."

Nevertheless the "white-faced Johnnies" continue to come to the country. Most of them are mine managers of some kind; but frequently one of their number shows he is made of the right stuff despite his effeminate appearance, and, going out among the mining camps, works himself with pick and shovel in an endeavour to develop a property on his own account. He invariably succeeds, too; then the rough-and-ready prospectors, recognizing in him a leader of men, gather round him, and he soon finds himself at the head of a band of men who will accompany him to the ends of the earth. It is, of course, a well-acknowledged belief among the older miners that once a man has tasted of the life of untrammelled bush freedom, he will never content himself in cities afterwards. It seems too true, and thus the young white-faced Briton—minus the eye-glass and collar—develops a stern look about the face, and his eyes become wonderfully true when glancing along the sights of a rifle. He acts promptly, too, and will most likely set out on some hazardous prospecting expedition after his first brief holiday in Sydney or Melbourne.

Life in the copper or "Gulf" country is not so monotonous as in other parts of Australia. Animals are more abundant, and the presence of a variety of reptiles round one's camp affords sufficient excitement

to keep the nerves in order. The rivers, too, sometimes have water in their channels, while the frequent devastating sand-storms, bush fires, epidemics, wild-cat plagues, and the probabilities of finding an out-crop of copper oxide ore carrying forty per cent. copper, all go to make up a day's work.

Personal experiences, however, may convey a better knowledge of the people and things as they are now than general writing, and as mine have been somewhat varied, the reader may gather a very fair impression.

When I first struck the Gulf country I was riding up from the south with a companion of former travels. We were prospecting for anything and everything that might have a value, but at the time were looking for indications that might lead us to a new copper-field said to be in the vicinity, although no one whom we met seemed to know exactly where. Yet all declared the ore which had come from it to be marvelously good.

One day when our horses were just about dropping under us we spied some high limestone bluffs a few miles to our right, and, knowing that there must be water in their vicinity, we steered for them, and, to our surprise, discovered a township nestling at their base.

"What place is this?" enquired my companion, a wiry Victorian bearing the cognomen of the Shadow, riding up to a solitary individual sitting in the roadway.

"What does you think?" responded the inhabitant, a powerfully-built man with a black beard. His face assumed a vacant, or it may have been a thoughtful, expression as he spoke, and he fixed his eyes on the nearest lime bluff.

"Darn ye!" roared the Shadow, who often got angry without reason. "I asked you what was the name of this here township."

"Can't you see I'm thinking, you fool," mildly remarked he of the black beard.

"Pass on, Shadow," I said to my companion, "the man is drunk."

"Lor', Boss! how did you know?" cried the individual in question. "Of course I am. I have just busted up fifty sovs in the pub over there, an' the Lor' knows, if I haven't got drunk for my money I have got nothing else."

"Yes, you are pretty bad," I said. "Some one will ride over you if you sit there long."

"Ah! I have it now! Bill Mauley or Black Bill is my handle. I knew I must have a name."

He rose to his feet and ran his hands through his pockets, evidently surprised to find that he could stand. But I could not afford to waste time with such as Bill, so, while he delivered himself at length of his opinion regarding a certain hotel-keeper, the Shadow and I rode over to an erection that advertised itself in crudely-painted letters to be the "Star of the West" Hotel.

"Can our horses get a feed here?" I asked, after we had fished out the proprietor from among some barrels where he was sleeping.

"You bet they can, Boss. How is copper?"

"I don't know the present market price of copper. Kindly take these animals in hand."

"Lor', Boss, you needn't get oxidized! I know ye, but I'm all right. You are the Government Mine Inspector, and ye are out about the new 'shows' on Pelican Creek, ain't you?"

There was a look in the man's eyes as he spoke that I did not like, but perhaps it was natural with him.

"Oh, am I? Then it seems as if there were more than Black Bill in this quarter who don't know themselves?"

"That's nothing, Boss. Why, I've had men lying over on the road there for a month who didn't know whether they were out or in."

"Out or in," it should be explained, is Queensland vernacular for dead or alive. But as the landlord had now departed with the Shadow to attend to our steeds, I was spared the effort of maintaining further conversation, and idly speculating on what the name of the place might be, the number of degrees the temperature was over a hundred, the locality of Pelican Creek, if the new shows there were what we were looking for, and if once more it was to be our luck to be concerned in the development of a new field, I turned to the door and met Mr Bill Mauley coming in.

"'Scuse me, Boss," he said. "Have you seen a green-haired, cross-eyed son of a gin vitriol seller about here lately?"

"He has just gone round into the yard with our horses," I answered; "but you might let him attend to them before you transact your business."

"Oh, I'm only going to wipe him out. It won't take a minute," he cried reassuringly, turning to go away. I managed to detain him, however.

"Hadn't you better wait until it is cooler," I suggested. "Besides, you ought to be grateful for the fact that you are now in your senses, instead of being helplessly intoxicated in the roadway."

"Stranger," began Bill, "listen and I'll explain."

"Please don't," I pleaded. "It is too hot, and I am tired."

"But you won't be when you know what I'm going to tell you."

"Then fire away." I sat on a barrel and lit a cigarette, knowing that a real "stagger-juice" thirst would soon stop Bill's flow of eloquence.

"It's this way," he started. "Every one here knows me, and I am worth two ordinary men when I'm not drunk. I discovered the Pelican Creek shows—O Lor'! they're good—but I kept the secret well, an' dodged every one who followed me going back, when I came in with a load of thirty-three per cent. stuff. The darned fools think the place is south of here 'cause my tracks go that way, but they——"

"Be careful, Bill," I broke in. "You will be telling me before you know."

"An' I mean to, Boss," Bill answered; "but keep your ears open. I came in last night with another team of ore, which I sold to L——'s agent for fifty pounds. I had with me, too, my survey sketch of Pelican Creek to send down to Herberton with my application for a lease. Now I remember comin' in here for a long beer after that, and then I am beat until I saw you and another fellow riding over me out there."

"Well?"

"Well! Darn ye, Boss, my survey map is gone, and so is my fifty sovs. An' where's Mick Flannigan, the hotel-keeper's brother-in-law, when he isn't here to take your horses, as is his business, if he isn't

riding like H—— to Herberton to post an application for my leases in their ugly old names?"

Here Bill's indignation became too much for him, and he, with great feeling, gave vent to his opinions in language which I did not quite understand. He stopped suddenly, however, and began speaking earnestly in a low tone of voice.

"Stranger," he said, "will ye stand by me? I have a plan."

"I will, Bill," I answered, "if you keep sober."

"It's a bargain, then," cried Bill, grasping my hand. "Pelican Creek, as I call the place, is only —— miles from here. Take the track west until you come to the big lime bluff shaped like a man's head, then turn up the gully for two miles until you can just sight Tower, Dingo, and Distant peaks in a line. You can't miss the spot, 'cause you'll see a tree blazed with B. M. on it where you leave the creek. Climb up the bluff then, and go into the cave you'll find at the end of the pad, and hug the right wall all through—mind you, the right wall, or you'll go down prospecting suddenly deeper than you'll like. After a bit you'll come out again on the other side of New Chum's Ridge right into the middle of my ground, and Pelican Creek runs down the slopes alongside—leastways, when there's water in it."

I noted down the directions as Bill gave them, and then looked at him for further information regarding his plan.

"You get there with your mate as quick as if a plug of gelignite had dropped you there. I'll pretend to be drunk still, and the old thief won't think he needs to start on his claim-jumpin' racket so long as I am here."

"But couldn't you go yourself now just as well. His application would be refused if you were on the ground."

"No, darn ye, Boss, no! I'm too drunk to get there, and if I moved out now every man in the town would be after me, and the place would be rushed so that it would be no good to any one. You get there somehow first. The track I take my horses goes right round the ranges out to Moldiva, but you can ride right up to the cave. Ah! here the old darn pirate comes."

Bill fell on the floor and began snoring, and the landlord and the Shadow entered.

"Hallo!" cried the drink dispenser on seeing Bill. "Are you back here again? I beg pardon, Boss, for that thing annoying a guest in my house, but I'll fire him out quickly and lively."

"Please don't," I said. "There are worse than drunk men in this part of the world."

"That's true, Boss," leered the publican. "By the way, if ye is going to be in this quarter long, I would like to get you to look at some shows I am interested in on Pelican Creek."

"Ah! Where is Pelican Creek?"

"Out the road there. The last Mine Inspector before you was a great pal of mine."

"Was he, indeed?" I answered. But knowing the gentleman referred to well, I felt certain the man lied. "I should have credited him with better judgment."

"Oh! fair play, Mr R——. That is your name, ain't it?" laughed Sharkley, which was the hotel-keeper's name.

"That is the handle the inspector goes by," put in

the Shadow gravely. "But it isn't the Boss's," he added, under his breath.

"We'll leave names alone in the meantime," I said coldly. "I have no objection to seeing your mines while I am here, but I do not promise to report on them to your advantage."

"Oh, that will be all right!" laughed the man. "The C—— people will take up the property from me, and there will be some good plunder going for all concerned."

"Ah! When is tea-time?"

"Five o'clock in Murgoona."

"Then this is Murgoona township?"

"It is, Boss. Ain't it A1? There are about eight hundred men here."

"Where? I have only seen two."

"Under the ground mining copper. We are on top of them now."

"Ah, well, can you let us have a couple of fresh horses, and we'll take a look round for an hour?"

The landlord, eager to please the supposed Mine Inspector, soon provided fresh horses. A few words sufficed to make matters clear to the Shadow, after which we rode out of the town on the east side for the benefit of any who might be watching us, then doubling round one of the lime bluffs which are scattered promiscuously around this district, were soon on the track to the west, which we followed according to Bill's directions until we sighted the three peaks in line.

"I reckon this is going to be a toughish game, Boss," remarked the Shadow, as we left our horses in the shade and scrambled up to the cave entrance.

"Old Sharkley has men stationed all along the road.

I saw him semaphoring to them when we were out in the yard together."

"Well, they are evidently watching or waiting, for they expect some one. But it can't be us, for here's the cave," I said, and, breaking aside a small pandanus, we stooped and crawled through a hole in the limestone formation.

"Lor'!" gasped the Shadow next moment, when we lit a candle and saw the myriads of shimmering stalactites. "What have we struck?"

"Only a limestone cave," I answered; but we were in the largest and most beautiful hall I had even seen. "Move on and hug the right wall."

We made our way cautiously along the glistening floor until it dropped sheer away from under us, and the consequences of another step make me shudder still. There was a ledge about three feet wide running along the right-hand side, however, and when our candles showed us that, we carefully picked our steps over its slippery surface and began gradually to ascend into a dome-shaped upper part. Here the air was simply alive with bats and other flying creatures, and we had to strike out blindly with our hands as they dashed towards the light, and, striking the walls, fell feebly fluttering into the unfathomable abyss of darkness at our feet.

"Pelican Creek copper may be all right," spoke the Shadow as we journeyed on, "but I am darned if I like the road to it—— Lor'! what is that? There is a man down there."

We paused. A loud thunderous discord reverberated through the cold, clammy atmosphere; it raged terrifically for a few seconds, and then died away into a series of faint moans and finally into nothingness.

"Shadow!" I cried, and the ejaculation shot from peak to crag like a rifle-shot, and played among the clusters of inverted spires and minarets like a flash of lightning on a ship's mast. "That is merely your voice echoed and re-echoed from the walls of the cave. Hurry on!"

The Shadow uttered some words which sounded like Black Bill's tirade, but as we now had trouble in keeping our candles from being blown out by a current of air which had sprung up, we knew we were near an exit, and a few steps farther showed us a white streak of light apparently overhead. This proved to be the passage to the external world, and soon we were standing on a huge copper outcrop surveying the famed Pelican Creek and Black Bill's tent and excavations.

"I am darned hungry," was all the Shadow commented, and, entering the tent, he found the wherewithal to make a meal, and soon we were sitting on the outcrop waiting for the billy to boil to provide us with tea. It was now half-past four in the afternoon, and the sun was already dipping behind the rides.

"We'll repeg the ground to-morrow," said the Shadow complacently. "There should be enough money in this ground to pay for two or three more exploring trips."

"We'll repeg it now!" I cried, springing to my feet. "I hear something on wheels coming down the ridges."

The Shadow rushed into the tent and brought out Bill's rifle.

"It's as well to be prepared, I reckon," he said; "but, Lor'! it's only a sulky driving tandem an' two

men in it. An' one is a 'new chum.' I can see that by his clothes."

"That is young M—— of London!" I exclaimed. "I met him in Singapore three months ago. The other man driving is Sharkley——"

We sat still, and the sulky came up, and had just deposited its occupants when they saw us.

"Good Lor'!" cried Sharkley, in amazement, "how did you get here?"

"Flying machine," answered the Shadow.

"You are just in time for tea, M——," I said, ignoring Sharkley. "Draw in that lump of copper carbonate and sit down."

"I have come out to buy this property from this gentleman," M—— explained to me, after he had recovered from his astonishment at meeting an old friend.

"I don't think it is for sale," I said.

"Don't slate it, Boss," pleaded Sharkley. "It's all O K, and I'll give you a fair thing out of it."

"I didn't know it was yours!"

"Oh yes, it's mine! I registered it at Herberton by wire this morning."

"But the name on the pegs spells 'Bill Mauley.'"

"An' he abandoned it. He didn't put in the labour according to regulations, an'—I—I——"

"Jumped it. Exactly; and never saw the place before. Know this, that if Bill Mauley, the discoverer, did not comply with the mining law regulations, you certainly have not done so. It so happens that the Shadow and I are in his employment at present, and have been on the ground well within the limit of time."

"But you daren't hold ground. You are the Mine Inspector."

"Oh no, I am not——"

"He's my partner, you old thief," interrupted Mauley's voice from the cave entrance; "and if you are not started on the back track over the ridges in two minutes, I'll tie you on top of a case of dynamite and blow you to the devil."

Mauley slid down, and without a word Sharkley climbed into the sulky.

"Mr M—— is not going back with you, Sharkley," I said. "He is staying here to-night."

M—— accepted the invitation willingly.

"This is the second time you've got the better of me in a deal," he laughed, as Sharkley drove off.

"But I reckon the third is always darned lucky," consoled the Shadow. But he didn't add that he thought it would still be lucky for us.

"Well, darn it all, boys," cried Mauley, as we gathered round the fire in the fast-falling darkness, "my partner here bosses this show now, but as far as I am concerned there is enough good ground here for us all. Why can't we form a syndicate among us and work it ourselves?"

And we did.

The Rush at Crocodile Crossing

MURGOONA is a hot, sulphurous-smelling township of about eight hundred inhabitants, seven hundred of whom are engaged in the copper-mining industry, or in the dispensing of a certain liquid substance constituted largely of vitriol to those so employed. Of the population not covered by the above description ninety-nine per cent. are card-sharpers and such like, who consider it their duty to relieve the miners of their money as fast as they get it, and to receive with open arms the chance "new chum" who forms the remaining one per cent. of the people, so long as his money lasts.

There is, of course, no law in Murgoona, unless that recognized by each man as best suited to himself. There are no religious bodies—not even the Salvation Army—and this is a significant fact to those who know the enterprising nature of that organization, and, according to the men, "Sunday never comes farther up the line than C——," many miles off.

The miners themselves, however, are in reality as good a body of men as can be found anywhere in the British Empire. They have only one failing, and they know it.

"Lor'! Boss! if we didn't drink the stagger juice, no one would," said one to me recently, "and then

how would Sharkley, Lette, O'Brian, Hetherington, Dunmore, and the other poor publicans live?"

I did not suggest that it would make little difference to any one except the card-sharping fraternity whether they lived or not. I knew that would not be in accordance with the system of logic in vogue in any Queensland mining camp. I pointed out, however, that the gentlemen in question had in all probability already made sufficient capital out of the men to keep them in affluence the rest of their lives. But it was of no use my endeavouring to start an anti-dilute sulphuric-acid-drinking campaign in Northern Queensland, and I was well aware of that fact. The miners think it their duty to "stand by the hotel-keeper," as they say, and while in town they certainly do so. They do not wish to be in town, however, for they are mostly wandering back-blockers. The atmosphere of a closely-packed settlement stifles them, and they long for the freedom of the bush with the sky for their roof, their own claims for their own domain, and the chances of wresting a fortune from Nature's grasp their hope.

But they cannot work independently against adverse circumstances. Their means of providing life's necessities become exhausted, and then they are forced to betake themselves to the nearest centre where they can find employment for wages in the service of some of the large mining companies round whose mines the towns are always built. Thus it is that the miners in Murgoona, when they are able to amass sufficient funds to enable them to start out for themselves again, invariably form into small prospecting parties, and set out for whatever district has yielded the latest favourable reports.



MURGOONA

Often, too, if a "rush" develop into what promises to be a lasting field, or one that will sell to British capitalists, the hotel-keepers "grubstake" men to work for them. That is, they provide the miners with food and water, pay the working expenses, and take half the profits in the venture. This applies on all mineral fields, whether of gold, silver, tin, wolfram, or copper, and, as a result, most famous working mines are owned by the drink-selling gentry of the neighbourhood, for, of course, they soon find means of acquiring the other half when the mine is proved to be good. But all "rushes" do not develop into payable fields, although occasionally one stands out prominently as having been the cause of the "rise" of some individual, and many surprise people by results exceeding all expectation. On the other hand, some "rushes" occasion surprise from quite a different reason, and the Crocodile Creek Rush was one of the latter kind.

Crocodile Creek is one of the largest tributaries of the Walsh River. It is one of the few channels which carry water all the year round, and flows through a series of mountain gullies over a rocky bottom, in which numerous deep holes are worn by the swirling action of the grit-charged torrents of Christmas time, when deflected from their onward course by a dioritic bluff, the formation of which proved of more than usual hardness. Gold had been found in the sands of Crocodile Creek, but no one troubled about that metal while copper stood at sixty-nine pounds per ton, and was steadily rising. But although the country around looked very promising, nothing in the way of copper had been found in any of its many reefs, and consequently nearly all those prospecting had gone

farther out in hopes of striking the famous Croydon belt.

Our mines on Pelican Creek were being developed under the care of our comrades, so, feeling competent to handle successfully some additional properties, the Shadow and I had gone out prospecting. The evening of the second day we camped on the banks of a large creek a few hundred yards north of where the track leading from some prosperous mines to Murgoona crossed. We had hobbled our horses out for the night, and were preparing our evening meal, when a man leading a spare horse rode down the opposite bank, swam the horses across, and galloped away to the east at a great pace.

"That fellow is in a hurry, I reckon," said the Shadow, as the rider disappeared over a ridge.

"He'll have to ride faster still if he means to catch to-morrow morning's mail at Murgoona," I answered. "I suppose he is a despatch rider from some of the Bonanza group of mines."

"Don't know," grunted Shadow; "tucker's ready."

It was now dark, and we sat round our camp fire and dined, paying more attention to the snakes and centipedes that insisted on joining our little party than to the plashing in the pool beside us. Suddenly, however, there was a series of louder sounds from the water, as if some heavier body had come out for its supper.

"The crocodiles are lively to-night," I remarked. "We'll go and shoot some when the moon rises."

"Darn the crocs!" ejaculated Shadow, helping another snake into the fire with his boot. "I would rather have them around me than most men."

"Can yez spare me a bit ov tucker, bhoys. Oi've

lost mine in the water, an' oi'm as hungry as a Chinaman."

The speaker was a tattered, corrugated-faced specimen of humanity, and as he stood before us the water ran away from his clothes in streams.

"Great howling centipedes!" exclaimed Shadow, signing to the man to sit down beside us. "Has ye just crossed that pool there among the crocs?"

"Oi had to cross somewhere. Me mate left me, and I saw your fire——"

"Was that your mate who crossed on horseback?" I cried.

"Oi don't know, Boss. All oi knows is that me mate cleared out with both our horses, and Pat Regan's left again."

"Ah, well, Patrick," I said. "Have something to eat in the meantime, and we'll see what can be done for you in the morning."

"Oi say, Boss," began Patrick, after satisfying his hunger, "is a claim any good to yez like it is to some ov the other fellows in town?"

"I hardly understand you, Pat. It depends largely on the claim."

"Oi mean a claim supposed to be good but ain't. Can't you sell that sort of thing to Johnnies that don't know no better, like the way Sharkley and old Flannigan does?"

"I am afraid not, Pat. You see, our ideas of right and wrong are different from those held by such gentlemen. Are you a 'crook' claim-finder?"

"Begorrah, I isn't. But here's me shtory. Me mate, Shandy Bob, an' me were looking over them ridges for copper outcrops. Bob had been pulling

me leg so much that when I went down to the water to fill a water-bag, oi thought it would be grand fun to make Shandy think oi had struck gold. So I took one or two slugs oi got over at Croydon from the lining ov me trousers an' put them in the lid ov me billy with some sand. I took the stuff up to where Shandy was an' tould him to wash it out, as it looked like stuff I had seen before carrying good gold. He called me a fool for not knowing no better, but he washed out the billy lid an' got my slugs an' then, be the powers! you should have seen him.

“ ‘Where did you get it?’ he cried.

“ ‘Down there,’ I tells him. ‘Will we go and peg the place out?’

“ ‘You go and get some more,’ he says, an’ as I had another slug or two, I goes away laughing to myself. Before I got down though it shtruck me that I would have a share of the work of washing out the river meself, an’ that was a mighty big contract to take on for nothing but getting even with Bob. I turned to go back an’ tell him all. But, be the powers! all I saw of him when I got to the foot of the hill was a cloud of dust kicked up by his horse makin’ for Murgoona, an’ the sand-blasted ould haythen had my horse with him too.”

The Shadow and I laughed. It was not often that the hotel-keeping crowd and their followers “fell in,” as Shadow put it. But Shandy Bob was known to be one of Sharkley’s satellites, so they were likely to be led into error this time. Of course there would be a “rush,” and they would “grubstake” every man who could not hold out on his own account. And equally certain was it that the thirst-quenching fraternity would lose on the transaction unless they

could sell their worthless shows to "new chums," which game I intended to frustrate if possible.

During the night we crossed the creek and pegged the banks for half a mile farther up the stream. This we did to draw the "rush" away from our camp, for they would assuredly cluster round the supposed good ground which they would naturally expect Pat to have secured. We did not wish to remove our camp nor have a crowd such as we expected near us while we were prospecting.

About noon the following day the "rush" began to arrive. First came Sharkley, mounted on a thoroughbred race-horse.

"Where was the gold found?" he yelled to Pat as he came up.

Shadow and I kept out of sight.

"Didn't Bob tell ye?" enquired Pat, apparently surprised at being asked.

"No, you d—— imbecile!" roared Sharkley, jumping off. "Ah! you haven't had the sense to peg it out, I see. I'll soon fix that."

He began pacing of the ground on which stood our tent, but stopped when Shadow put in an appearance.

"Go on," advised my companion, "I want to know the measurements around the place."

"When did you get here?" cried Sharkley.

"We were here almost as soon as the gold——"

"Where is it?"

"It ain't here."

"I know that, you idiot——"

"An' you won't see it this rush, you galvanized streak of misery——"

The sound of a blow made me rush from the tent

in time to see Sharkley struggling on the ground, where Shadow had sent him headlong with his blow.

"Get up, you dingo, till I knock you down again," cried my comrade.

"Leave the man alone, Shadow," I ordered.

"He called me an idiot, Boss."

"Then thrash him afterwards if you like; I need you just now."

Shadow turned and saw what I had seen the moment before, and, taking advantage of his opportunity, Sharkley wriggled down the slope, swam the creek, and raced up to where he could now see the ground was pegged. Meanwhile the "rush" had arrived. First came some riders, then Flannigan driving tandem in a sulky, followed by more riders. A crowd of cyclists and people on foot connected them with several buggies and other slower-moving conveyances, and alongside one camel strode clumsily with an Afghan upon its back. Some Chinese and loafers made up the rest, but the only genuine miners among the lot were the men on foot and one or two riders.

"Where is it?" the leaders sang out as they approached the crossing.

The Shadow silently pointed to the pegged ground, and the heterogeneous mob plunged into the water and followed Sharkley along the other side.

"The circus is about to start, I reckon," remarked Shadow, who had now recovered his equanimity, aiming a piece of iron-stone at a crocodile basking on the rocks in the pool.

"Well, our pegs will hold all the ground we want," I rejoined. "So we can go on with our own search for copper."

"Cyan yez do with an Oirishman in your party?" asked Pat. "Shure an' I know copper as well as any man, for oi've been in North Queensland the last twenty years."

"We'll take you in company just now, at any rate, Pat; but don't go finding more gold."

Pat grinned and shook his fist at the form of his late partner, whom we could see driving in pegs adjoining our own; and while the men of the "rush" scrambled for what they considered the best ground near the discovery claim, we walked up the slopes on our own side of the creek, and put forth much muscular energy in breaking the tops of iron-stone reefs in the hope of finding traces of copper underneath.

We continued our efforts until well on in the afternoon, and then Pat uttered an exclamation and threw a piece of some metallic substance to me.

"What do yez call that?" he said.

I looked at the specimen. It was heavy and of a greenish-grey colour, but it was no copper ore that I knew.

"Is there much of this, Pat?" I enquired, scratching its surface with my pocket-knife to determine its hardness.

"The strike is over a quarter of a mile long, an' it is two feet thick."

"An' if the darned stuff goes down to where Jimmy Squarefoot stays," added Shadow, who had gone over to Pat's find, "only the old fellow himself can say how much there is."

"What is it, anyhow?"

I turned quickly, for the speaker was neither Shadow nor Pat, and beheld a very tall individual

with a face the colour of copper and bare arms like the trunk of a pandanus-tree. He had evidently crossed from the "rush" on the other side of the creek.

"I beg your pardon," I said.

"Don't trouble," the stranger responded. "What is that stuff you have in your hand?"

"I don't know." I poured a little nitric acid on the material and applied the blade of my knife. "It isn't copper—it isn't wolfram—it isn't molybdenite, for that is silvery white, and of the nature of graphite to the touch—it does not appear to be silver, for—— Well, men, I don't know what this is, but I will assay it to-night."

Shadow and Pat picked up their tools and went on with their work, but the visitor stood still and assumed a sullen expression.

"Have any of your people struck gold yet?" I enquired, wishing to be sociable.

"No; and it ain't likely they ever will on Crocodile Creek."

"Do you think there is no gold there?"

"I am darned well sure of it; but say, who started this 'rush'? What is the 'rush' for, anyhow? An' why are your people not in it?"

I explained that we had camped on the creek before the "rush" took place and were prospecting for copper.

"Well, all I can say is that if I had the fellows that started this 'rush' out here, I'd put them through as good as a smelting-furnace. I've lost the little bit of cash I was savin' over it, an' I suppose other boys are just as bad."

"I thought you were all working for the hotel-keepers?"

"Not now. The darned skunks promised to back us up, but they left this afternoon when they saw that only iron-sand stuck to the pan. It ain't any good to any man."

"Only working miners are here now, then?"

"Yes; the poor beggars that work are still here. They won't let their hopes go down, although there ain't any chance of getting gold. We all know what the town life and working for companies is."

"Well, come down to our camp with me. I wish to try an experiment."

We walked down the hill, followed soon after by Shadow and Pat, who guessed that something was about to happen. Reaching the tent, I gave the stranger a piece of the unknown mineral to "dolly" (crush into powder), and while Shadow prepared tea, I put ten grains of the powder into a small crucible with some nitric acid, and placed it on the ashes beside our billy. Some of the other miners had now given up work in despair, and had wandered down on the other bank of the creek opposite our camp.

"Is it a strike?" cried some, seeing the burette and other testing appliances in my hand. There was silence for a moment as I added hydrochloric acid and waited for a precipitate to form.

"No," cried the tall stranger ruefully. "No such luck. We are on the losing side again, boys, and there is no help for it."

"You are in a darned mighty hurry," complained Shadow, who with Pat and the stranger had been hanging over the "test" breathlessly. "The darned stuff hasn't had time to come down yet."

"An' it never will, because it ain't there to come," answered the miner.

"You seem to know a darned lot too much about it. How do you know what the Boss is looking for?" spoke Shadow aggressively.

"He is testing for silver, and there should be a white precipitate, which should turn black on exposure to sunlight—and there isn't. No! you needn't think I want to trade on that little knowledge, boys. It was knowing too much that first sent me up here to this God-forsaken country."

I looked at the man, surprised at the change in his speech, and it dawned upon me that he was another of that great army of "men with a past" that forms such a large part of the North Queensland population. But Shadow was crushing another sample of the same stone. Pat was smoking, evidently lost in the profundity of his thoughts; the stranger was gloomily silent, and the men opposite discussing the best means of getting back to Murgoona.

Soon Shadow sieved the ore and placed another ten grains in a beaker with a solution of cyanide of potassium from my portable chemical case, and when he went out and placed the vessel on the ashes again, most of the men, seeing that an important test of something was being made, came over the creek and clustered round silently. I allowed the suspected ore to digest for ten minutes, then hurriedly removed it and added some nitric acid.

All eyes watched the result; then, as several seconds passed and no precipitate came down, a sigh of disappointment rose from us all.

"Give it time, boys," I said; "the solution is too hot yet."

"There it goes, boys! Look!" yelled a little miner excitedly, as a white powdery substance began to fall in snowy flakes through the liquid.

"It's only lead," spoke another man. "There's five pound fifteen a ton charged on lead for realization, one pound ten for smelting, and as it will cost over a couple of sovereigns to team it in from here, we'll just lose a sovereign a ton and work for nothing on that stuff, allowing that it goes over thirty per cent."

"But it ain't lead!" exclaimed another miner. "Lead would have shown in the first test with the nitric."

"It doesn't matter to us what the darned stuff is, anyhow," put in the tall stranger. "It isn't copper, and it isn't silver, it isn't gold, and it isn't wolfram, or molybdenite, and nothing else will pay to work here; and if it did, it isn't ours. It all belongs to these people here."

"I wish to know who started this 'rush' to Crocodile Creek," spoke a bull-necked man known as "the Bruiser" among his fellows. "I would see that they didn't start any more 'rushes' for some time."

I moved out into the fast-fading daylight with a test-tube of the mineral in my hand.

"I don't think you have cause to blame any one for this 'rush,'" I said. "You simply rushed the wrong thing."

"What?" yelled all. "What do you mean, Boss?"

"Just that the 'rush' is about to start now. There is as much of this stuff within a few feet of the surface as will pay you all sufficient to enable you to go prospecting again."

"What is it, Boss? For Heaven's sake tell us! What is it?"

I held up the tube in my hand, and as the sun's last rays fell on it, it slowly turned purple, then violet black.

"It is what is technically known as embolite," I said, "or in other words, chloro-bromide of silver."

"But its value, Boss? What is it worth?"

"The latest quotation for silver is two shillings and fourpence an ounce, and"—I filtered the black powder from its solution and made a rough calculation—"as nearly as I can figure out just now without more accurate testing, there are over fifty ounces of this to the ton."

.
Crocodile Creek silver mines are at present worked by the best community of miners in the district. They formed themselves into a syndicate so as to concentrate part of their labour on one or two deep level shafts, while the others kept the whole party in funds by the ore derived from the surface workings. What those deep levels will develop into no man can yet tell, but the prospects are highly encouraging. There is much sorrow and bewailing among a certain fraternity in Murgoona over the "hard luck" at losing both the share in a good property and twenty men's thirst at the same time. One of them made an attempt to open a saloon at the creek workings, but the team bringing out the vile fluid met with an accident, for which (I suspect, although I do not absolutely know) my tall friend and the Shadow were responsible.

The Sinking of the "Golden Promise" Mine

COPPER-MINING has a fascination peculiarly its own. Like mining for gold, the industry is more or less of a gambling nature ; but whereas the seeker after auriferous treasure speculates his time and labour on the chances of finding gold, his brother of the copper-fields gambles on what his property may be worth underneath the ground after he has found it. When gold is met with on the surface, the prospector usually considers his work as good as accomplished. But one may find an outcrop of rich copper ore running along a ridge for several miles, and yet it is only a chance if the lode proves worth working. On the other hand, a shaft sunk where there were almost no surface indications of copper might "bottom" on a large body of copper sulphide averaging twenty-five per cent. copper, which would pay better than most gold mines. Thus it comes that the copper prospector never knows his luck. One moment he may be sinking on a lode carrying poor copper carbonate ore, not worth the price of the explosives used in getting it, and then, as suddenly as the gold miner, might drive his pick into a nugget, and certainly, outside story-books, a great deal oftener,

the lode may "make" into an oxide of copper worth twenty pounds a ton. This may extend underneath a few feet or—there is no reason why it should not—down to the sulphide zones. It might fall away into a poor rubble again, or, after changing into sulphides at the water level, go down into the bowels of the earth farther than man or machinery has ever followed. It is this uncertainty that lends the industry its fascination, and makes the poor individual miner hold on to his ground long after it has ceased to be payable. Before this some big company, considering the property "a good prospect," may have made the miner an offer to purchase his ground, but their price being based on what the "show" is, and not what "the chances are that it will be," the offer is usually declined. In time, however, the miner gets his shaft down deeper, and still the "oxide" evades him, and he is compelled for lack of funds to cease operations. No one would entertain a proposal to buy the "show" now, for the miner's own work has made it impossible to hide the fact that the country has been barren, perhaps, for the last forty feet. Nothing now remains for the unlucky prospector but to abandon the scene of his hopes and labours and take hateful employment from the very company who at one time offered to buy his mine.

But now the irresistible gambling fascination exercises its fateful spell. The news that old MacPherson was forced to abandon his "show" spreads throughout the country, and men, when passing in to town with ore or for stores, will ride over to have a look at it.

"It is a true fissure lode," one will reason with his mate, "and may turn good at any depth."

"That is a fact," his comrade will respond. "It might be good thirty-per-cent. stuff just one shot down."

He doesn't add what in reasoning moments he will admit: "That the blanky stuff might just as well go down all the way to old Jimmy Squarefoot an' there turn into brimstone."

At any rate, they agree to give the "show" a trial, and commence shooting the shaft down farther. They may strike the rich ore in the first foot—for undoubtedly the lode carries it at some depth—or they may work a month and have nothing but a deeper hole for their pains. Eventually they too abandon it, and another couple have a try with no better results. Half a dozen different parties may own the property in succession—for to own it one has merely to occupy it and give each corner boundary peg a tap with a hammer to signify repegging—and still the desired ore may apparently be as far off as ever. Then one day, when the shaft is down a hundred feet or so into the heart of Queensland, a shout will come up from the depths, and the man on top at the windlass will know that they have at last "struck it."

But even now Nature does not give up the struggle, and the good fortune of the miners may prove to be a form of cruellest irony, for while they are estimating the value of the supposed solid body of "black ore" per foot in depth, and putting in another shot to square the sides of their shaft, water may break in, and the men are beaten again. The never-despairing spirit of the Anglo-Saxon, in whatever clime, rises strongly in the poor human footfalls of fate, however, and they rig up some sort of pump, with horse haulage,

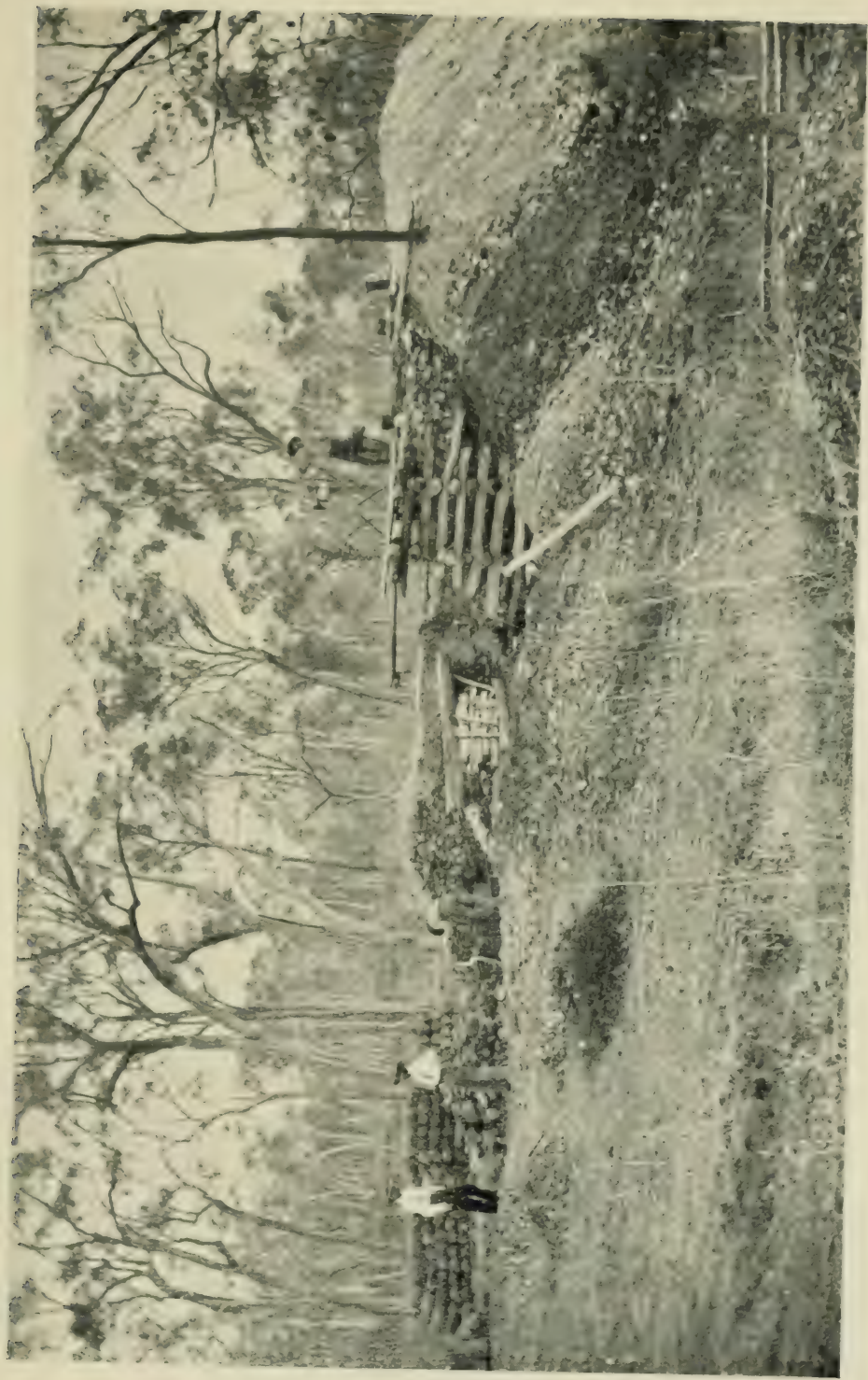
or, if they have still funds, an engine to work it. The water may be gaining slowly, in which case the men win; but when thy put in another shot it may prove to be an underground river they have broken into, and then, with fortune in sight, the luckless miners have of necessity to accept what any powerful company owning the best appliances will give them for their mine, or abandon it as did the first owner.

Such is the "glorious" uncertainty about copper. But that same uncertainty is its great attraction, for first-class ore may be struck in the first few feet—in fact it is frequently found as high as forty per cent. in assay value outcropping on the surface.

These are termed "promising shows," and such a one was the outcrop we named the "Golden Promise," which soon became the chief mine in our Pelican Creek possessions.

The "Golden Promise" mine was situated on a slight slope above Pelican Creek, and as we could trace the "strike"—*i.e.*, length of copper-carrying formation on the surface—for half a mile, we calculated that if it did go down and only extended the same underneath as it did on top—most mines widen out underneath if they go down at all—there must be many thousands of tons of copper ore in the mine. We had several other most promising "prospects" on Pelican Creek, but we decided to work them on the "underlie,"—that is, to follow the ore down at its own angle of dip—while we would make the "Golden Promise" shaft prove the value of the deeper levels by sinking it vertically to cut the calculated lode angle at a depth of eighty feet.

Our party at this time consisted of Philip Morris,



THE "GOLDEN PROMISE" MINE

a young Englishman of an adventurous disposition, the Shadow, and Black Bill, two typical Australian wanderers, and myself. We had also enlisted the services of five of the best of the miners, who were in temporary financial straits through having spent all their money on "shows" which they had been compelled to abandon. We promised them a share in any profits in addition to the wages we paid, and they, being thus interested in results, did all that men could do to bring about a success.

The lode of the "Golden Promise" dipped into the earth at an angle of forty-five degrees from the horizontal; but, being on the slope, I calculated that if we started our vertical shaft sixty feet farther down, we would hit the lode after it had travelled about one hundred and twenty feet.

Old Ruck, a prospector of much experience, and I marked off the site of the shaft, and the Shadow and Big Mackay, a brawny Scot, started it. Needless to say, they went at it with a will, and by pick and shovel where the ground was soft, and gelignite where it was hard, sent it down six feet the first day. A copper-prospecting shaft, it should be said, is usually made six feet by four, about twice the size of an average gold-prospecting shaft. The second day they only managed an additional three feet, for the ground was now almost of solid iron-stone formation. The third day, to hasten matters, they erected a windlass for hauling the "mullock," and added another two feet to the depth. At this point Black Bill and his working partner, a little man who rejoiced in the cognomen of Bunyip Bill, finished the payable work that, with two men, could be done on the "Admiral," and pending the knowledge as to whether the deep

levels were good or not, I put them on the "Golden Promise" as a second shift. Thus we shot her down—it was all shooting now—night and day, and when Ginger Bob, a stalwart, fiery-faced Queenslander, and the M.P., a broken-down member of the Queensland Parliament, "cut out" their oxide ore on the "underlie" of the "Caledonia," we did not sink another foot on the chance of it "making" again, but drafted the men at once on to the "Golden Promise," and thus, as the M.P. said, we had three shifts of eight hours each shooting one great hole into the heart of Queensland.

The men at first wondered at our lack of spirit in not sinking the "underlies" a foot or two farther, seeing that the probabilities were that they would speedily "make good" again. But when they realized that we were actually sinking our only deep shaft sixty feet away from the copper lode, and gambling on the chances of hitting it on the "sulphide level," they changed their minds, and reckoned Morris and I were born speculators.

Perhaps we were. At any rate, it was an expensive experiment; yet, if fortune favoured us, it would pay correspondingly. Meanwhile, from one week's end to another work never ceased, and at all hours of day and night heavy charges of gelignite blew tons of solid country into the air, and the shaft was driven slowly but surely down. At length the measuring-tape indicated that we had reached seventy-nine feet, and, on testing some of the stained formation brought up, I got two per cent. of copper, which was a good sign that we were near a lode of some kind. Excitement now ran high, and each shift strove to have the glory of first hitting the lode. The eighty-feet

level was reached and passed, and Morris and I began to think many things, while down below the men gave vent to their feelings in a picturesque language that would have made a Liverpool stevedore gasp. Still we continued our labours. But now I was in the shaft all day with the men, and Mowbray all night. Foot by foot the bottom receded until ninety feet was touched, and still we were apparently as far from the lode—if it existed at all—as the first day we started.

"I reckon the lode has cut out, Boss," said Bunyip Bill one day, as I went down with Mowbray to see the last exposed face of the work.

"An' it's just robbery for us to be taking wages for sinking any farther," added the M.P., who, with all the men, had come out to hear what was next to be done.

"Give it best, Boss, an' dig out the ore from 'The Princess,'" cried Old Ruck from above. "She'll pay you all right for your work."

"The lode must be here," said Morris, who was an expert geologist. "Both the hanging and foot walls are perfect. It must have continued down——"

"An' that's just where ye are wrong," interrupted Bunyip Bill. "In this darned country everything is just exactly opposite to what it should be, an' if the lode should be there, then you can bet your tucker it ain't."

"Let me gang doon anither foot or twa," pleaded Big Mackay. "Ginger an' me dinna want wages, an' we'll gang doon tae Auld Nick if ye think she's there."

"I sign my name to that, Boss," cried Ginger Bob. "We'll burst her out though we go to H—— for her."

Ginger Bob did not mean his words to be taken as they are generally understood when specifying the place he named. He believed it had a geographical position the same as Sydney, New York, or Port Said, and reckoned that at three foot a day he would get there some time.

"We'll give her a week yet," I said. "Surely our luck has not deserted us completely, and the lode may have altered its angle of descent slightly."

"What I fear is that we will tap the water held in these limestone caverns around if we have to go much deeper," spoke Morris; "and then we might as well try to bail out the Walsh River as to keep our mine dry."

"Well, we'll take our chance of that. We'll go down now and take careful measurements, and see if by any possibility we have made some mistake in our original calculations."

"There is not much hope of that," smiled Morris wearily, "but we'll go down."

The Shadow and Big Mackay were already drilling another hole in the bottom preparatory to shooting when we descended, and while they finished their operations we examined very carefully the wall of the shaft on the side next where the lode should be.

"I can't make out these copper stains here," said Morris as, suspended in a mullock bucket ten feet from bottom, he struck at the wall with a pick.

"They indicate the near presence of some copper-carrying formation," I replied.

"Then cannot that be our load slightly faulted, perhaps?"

"I fear not, for these stains extend all the way down, and if the lode was as close as they indicate up

there, we ought to have stuck it by this time in any case. No ; I fear the main copper deposits are inside these limestone bluffs, and we are sinking through country impregnated with copper probably precipitated from solution——"

"Do you mind going up, Boss?" cried Shadow. "I am going to fire this shot."

"Don't be in such a desperate hurry," I remonstrated.

"Can't help it," he said, lighting a match ; "my fingers are fairly burning to put a light to this fuse, 'cos I feel there's copper under it."

We did not care to take any risks, so Big Mackay and I went to the surface, and the rope was lowered again for Morris.

"Now, New Chum, in ye get," I heard Shadow's voice cry from below ; "I've fired it. We're both feather-weights, and can go up together."

At that moment there was a fierce tug at the hanging rope, the windlass-barrel ran out, and, gaining momentum rapidly, it reeled out the length of rope still on it, and then with a great jerk, before any one could do anything to stop it, jumped out of its bearings and fell down the shaft.

A sickly feeling came over me, as with the men I rushed to the mouth and looked down through the flying debris. Well every man knew that a windlass-barrel falling ninety feet would leave nothing alive under it.

"Say, Shadow, is ye killed?" cried Bunyip Bill ; and to our relief, after a moment's silence, there floated up the choicest words in the Queensland mining vernacular, the purport of which was, "Not yet, but will be in forty seconds."

"Clear away from the top, boys," cried Morris; "The fuse is fired, and it is all over with us."

"O Lor'!" gasped the men, "an' we can do nothing!"

"Get a rope, quick!" I cried; but in the same instant remembered that we had no rope long enough to reach the bottom excepting the one which had gone down with the windlass.

"It's no use, Boss," growled Old Ruck. "All the ropes in camp together can't reach that length, even if there was time."

"Good-bye boys!" came up faintly from the shaft, and I could also distinguish the sound of pick strokes.

"Hang into the off wall!" roared the men in chorus; but they knew themselves that there was not a chance in a thousand of those below being saved that way.

There was considerable danger to those on top of being struck by boulders flung clear of the shaft in the explosion; but not a man moved to save himself, and even Old Ruck ceased swearing, for the first time, it is said, in his life.

The seconds passed in grim silence, and then we looked vaguely at each other. What had happened?

"Lor'!" cried Ginger. "Listen!"

We did; and this is what we heard coming up from the ninety feet:

"I tell you, Shadow, you put that shot in the wrong place."

"An' I tell ye I didn't, New Chum."

"The ground was soft enough to be picked where you drilled your hole."

"No, it wasn't."

"It was, or I couldn't have picked in and nipped the fuse before it burnt down to the gelignite."

"Did ye cut the fuse, New Chum?"

"I did, or we should not be here now."

"No, darn it! I forgot that. I suppose we would be little angels now—— Say, New Chum, do you think a man, even if he were an angel, could fly like a brolga?" (a large bird sometimes known as a native companion).

But the men on top, now that they knew the danger was past, were not disposed to listen to a prolonged discussion on the laws of aerial navigation, angelic or otherwise, and they speedily showed their dissent in the torrent of language poured down the shaft.

"How in tarnation did the windlass-barrel not knock ye out?" demanded Bunyip Bill in a reproachful tone of voice, when his stock of expletives had been exhausted.

"The darned thing got jammed in the walls afore it got down to us," replied the Shadow, in an equally grieved voice.

"Shadow," I called, "What on earth made you light that fuse before you saw that all was ready for hauling you up?"

"Lor'! Boss, ye needn't be skeered about that so long as the New Chum is about," answered that worthy. "He dug the fuse out in two winks of a mosquito's eyelid afore it got down to the circus."

"It was my fault," cried Morris. "I sprang at the hanging rope when Shadow told me he had fired, and my weight caused the barrel to run out and jerk over the bearing-forks."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the M.P. "The man

that was so excited when the fuse was fired that he jumped at the rope before it was down, actually was cool enough next second to dig between it and the dynamite!"

"Well, men, there will be no more copper-mining in this shaft to-day," I said, and I very much doubt if there will ever be any further work done by us. Go and get all the ropes in camp, so that we can haul them out.

The men departed to gather all the ropes from the various windlasses of the "underlie" shafts, and I shouted down a caution to the reckless Shadow not to take any liberties where he was, as six plugs of unexploded gelignite underneath his feet were liable to resent rough treatment.

Shadow did not answer. He was gingerly digging out the half-burnt fuse, and by the time the men came back with ropes he had fitted another, and the shot was all ready for firing again.

We lowered Big Mackay on one rope made of several shorter lengths, and he took another down with him to fasten to the windlass-barrel.

"Don't be too long on the job," remarked Shadow, "'cos I has got to fire a shot this time or burst."

"An' if ye licht a match, or speak a word wi' ony reference tae a hot place A'll no mention," answered the Scot, as, hanging ten feet from bottom, he hitched the second rope round the barrel, "A'll come doon an hammer ye into yer ain drill-hole."

"You needn't be afraid, Mac," reassured Morris. "I'll keep an eye on him."

"Afraid!" snorted the big one, as he completed his work and signalled to be hauled up. "Man, A'm no' feared o' onything except that that skeletonized

streak o' misery doon beside ye will no' live lang enough for me tae deal wi' him."

Big Mackay's indignation was great, but the light-hearted Shadow only laughed. Exerting his strength as he was being pulled up, Mac braced himself against the walls of the shaft and jerked the windlass-barrel from its locked position. It remained suspended on the rope, but a shower of stones and "mullock" fell down, and, as Big Mackay admitted afterwards, he thought the Shadow's words would have fired any fuse.

When he reached the surface all hands tackled the windlass-drum, and, after a severe struggle, got it up and remounted in its position, and next minute the rope was down for Morris.

"I have a two-minute length of fuse in this time, New Chum," began Shadow, as Morris was hauled up the shaft.

"Don't fire! For Heaven's sake, don't fire, you idiot!" roared Morris; and, hearing the purport of his words, we put forth all our strength and brought him to the top in record time. The Shadow was still talking when the rope came down for him.

"No nonsense, now," I ordered, as he bent over the fuse with lighted match.

"Here now, Boss, does I deserve that?" he expostulated, as he applied the light, and, not wishing to argue with him just then, we straightway began hauling him up.

"Hold on, boys!" he suddenly shouted, and we paused in trembling surprise.

"Can copper sulphide ever be mixed with azurite?" he enquired, and we yanked him upwards angrily.

"Ye darned son of a gin, does ye not know what's under ye?" roared Old Ruck.

"Six plugs," answered the Shadow as he came in sight. "But, Lor'! boys, what's the hurry? It is a two-minute fuse, and I reckon I have found——"

"Oh, shut up!" roared the men; and he became silent.

I began to lecture the Shadow on his conduct as soon as he came off the rope, but the explosion below interrupted, and he dodged away without saying a word.

As soon as the gases had cleared, Old Ruck and I descended to see the result of the shot, and, to our dismay, found that we had at length tapped water.

"It's all over now," I said. "These limestone caverns must contain a lot of water, and this shaft will now drain them all."

Ruck did not answer. He had always been of a hopeful disposition, but now he could offer no consolation. We went aloft again without troubling to send the "mullock" up, and I informed the men that there was now no hope of going farther, as the water had broken in and we could not risk putting pumps on.

For a minute the men said nothing, then Ginger Bob spoke.

"It are darned hard lines," he said. "And it are all that darned Shadow's fault."

"Yes, of course it is," agreed Bunyip. "He would fire that last shot in spite of what we all said."

"Whaur is he? Let me get ma hauns on the skeleton," growled Big Mackay. "Come here, ye—ye——"

"It is not the Shadow's fault that we have lost the

lode," I put in; "but all the same, Pelican Creek camp is now broken up——"

"I say, Boss, does ye mind telling me now if ye ever get black ore and azurite in a lode formation?"

The speaker was the imperturbable Shadow.

"Of course you can," I replied irritably. "But this is no time for a school of mines class. We have no lode——"

"Bet ye the M.P.'s whiskers we have."

"What do you mean?"

"I found the lode, an' it comes in rich azurite amongst black ore."

"You're dreaming," said Morris; and the men laughed wearily.

"No, I ain't, New Chum. I ain't so all-fired skeert coming up a rope, even though them six plugs of gelignite were under me. I saw the lode there——"

"For Heaven's sake explain!" I cried.

"I'm trying to, Boss. I saw the stuff in the hole the windlass made, and I shouted to ye to stop hauling, but ye wouldn't wait."

"Why didn't you say that before, Shadow?"

"You wouldn't let me——"

I waited to hear no more, and in a few seconds was dangling in front of the wall face that the iron-flanged drum of the windlass had broken in its impetuous descent. A pick was lowered to me, and a minute or so's work sufficed to show that the lode was there right enough, a few feet below where we had originally calculated that it would be. It had altered its angle near that point, and had run down nearly vertical thence about a foot from our walls.

Big Mackay then took my place, and in a short

time erected a platform across the shaft, and the Shadow and he smashed into the wall with an energy worthy of a steam-engine.

Before nightfall we knew that we had a lode of twenty-five per cent. of copper sulphide, and, calculating on being able to remove only that above water-level, we estimated that there was sufficient ore to repay us tenfold for our outlay and labour.

Events proved we were correct, and the "Golden Promise" mine is now the deepest in the country.

The Shadow did not get the promised thrashing from Big Mackay.

“In Search of Eldorado”

THE season wore on, and things went well with us. We had now two camps in working order—Pelican Creek Copper and Crocodile Crossing Silver mines. The former workings were now generally considered to be one of the most valuable group of mines in Northern Queensland, and the syndicate at home whom I represented had completed the arrangements necessary for taking them over and working them with the latest and most improved machinery themselves. This fact, although in a way pleasing to me, because of my work having turned out so successful, was not hailed by my comrades with the unbounded delight one might naturally expect from men about to receive a substantial sum of money. Indeed, as the P. & O. steamer *China*, with the new mine manager on board, neared the Australian coast, their murmurs of dissent amounted almost to mutiny.

“I am darned if I think it is fair for a man to come out here and play at being mine manager after another fellow has done all the work,” growled Old Ruck one night, as we sat round our camp fire and discussed matters.

“He’ll be a darned clothes-prop of a new chum too,” added the Shadow dismally, “an’ won’t know carbonate of copper from baking powder.”

"But you men can soon instruct him in all things pertaining to copper," I said.

"Can we?" roared Bunyip Bill aggressively. "An' you can just bet the whole darned Australian Labour Party that we won't."

"My sentiments too," cried the M.P., "but I'm off the bet. I consider the Labour Party——"

"Hang the Labour Party," snorted Big Mackay. "Here we've been living a life o' untrammelled independence. We were a' guid freens in this camp, an' noo a stranger is comin' oot tae break us up."

"Darn it, Boss!" burst out the Shadow, who had been boiling over for the last few minutes, "you take it mighty quiet. Does ye not see that they is hittin' you too. You and Black Bill here found the place, an' now you are allowing another darned fool to come out and boss things. Why don't you or Morris manage the mines?"

"Oh, I am a prospector, Shadow. My business is to find minerals. Any man can work them after they are found. But I can't afford to waste my life doing what other people can be paid to do."

"There is something in that," mused the M.P., "for it would strike me as very funny to see the Boss writing out long mining reports for any board of directors in London or any other township."

The men laughed as the supposed humour of the situation struck them, and I smiled also. I had written reports before.

"But where do we come in?" enquired Black Bill. "It's all darned fine for you to go out prospecting, but what are we to do?"

"Well, if you don't wish to stay here and assist

the new mine manager to develop the properties you are all interested in, why, come with me."

"Does ye mean it, Boss?"

"Certainly."

"Does the invitation apply to us all?" enquired the M.P.

"It does, although I understood that you were standing for Murgoona again."

"Oh, Murgoona can get the other fellow now. I'll teach the aborigines the fundamental principles of Socialism."

"Will you have room for me in your party?" asked Morris, who had been more than usually silent during the evening.

"O Lor'! we must have the New Chum with us," cried the men.

"He can always help the cook if we don't get no mines for him to boss," added Ginger Bob.

"You see there is room for you, Morris," I laughed. "You are our man of parts."

"When will we start, then?" asked the Shadow, springing to his feet. "I must gather our horses in."

"Not to-night, in any case," I replied; and he sat down again sorrowfully.

Here Ginger Bob began to make preparations for supper, and before that meal was over, we had settled all our plans for the forthcoming prospecting expedition, and arranged that we would start as soon as possible after the arrival of the new man from home.

He came, a medium-sized, over-dressed young man, wearing eye-glasses and a three-inch collar, which, in the temperature of Pelican Creek, would choke him in a day. His language, too, was of that affected, mincing nature which a certain section of Britons

cultivate, and after the first hour of his company Morris and I felt sorry for him, and the life he would have among the unvarnished, outspoken miners. It was none of our business, however, although we wondered why he had been chosen by the home people to represent their interests, seeing that he apparently knew next to nothing about copper.

When we had done what we could to ensure success for him, Morris, who had been my deputy while I was at Crocodile Crossing, resigned command, and next day our party set out on a N.N.W. course, intending to go through to the Gulf by the Palmer River if nothing worth stopping for was encountered.

The new manager rode out with us the first few miles, and on saying good-bye, added: "You—aw—will let me know—aw—how you get along?"

"I am afraid the postal service does not extend in the direction we are going," I said, "but if we do have any opportunity, we shall let you know of our movements."

"Aw—thank you—aw—if you don't turn up, or I do not hear from you—aw—in three months, I shall come out after you."

"Oh, don't worry about us," I said, with as straight a face as I could assume. "We are strong enough to defend ourselves against the natives."

"And your mother might be angry if you left home without telling her," added the M.P., with a look of abstraction in his eyes.

"Well, good-bye, and good luck to you!" I said hurriedly, as we shook hands all round and turned away.

"Aw—*au revoir*, and—aw—good luck to you!" floated back to us; and we rode forward rapidly,

so that we might allow our facial muscles to relax.

“Good Lor’!” gasped Shadow, when he was able to speak, “an’ that is what is going to boss the miners. I’ll bet three kicks at Bunyip there old Sharkley will jump Pelican Creek in a week.”

“He’s a long way worse than our own New Chum,” said Old Ruck, gazing at Morris fondly.

“Oh, he’ll develop in time,” spoke the M.P. “I have no doubt Mr Morris was as green when he first struck this country.”

“No, darn ye, no,” exclaimed the men in chorus angrily, while Morris protested that he at least never wore a stiff shirt. I had dim recollections, however, that Morris, when first I met him on the gold-fields of Western Australia, was extremely like the new manager in every way.

Light-hearted and careless we rode on, and camped that night on the Walsh River, intending next day to cross and begin prospecting in earnest—the country on this side having been gone over too many times previously to allow of our finding anything of value.

Next morning, therefore, we divided ourselves into two parties—the one, consisting of Morris, Old Ruck, Ginger Bob, and Black Bill, taking the western side of the ranges, while the other, comprising the Shadow, the M.P., Bunyip Bill, Big Mackay, and myself, negotiated the eastern and more broken-up slope. Each party carried its own supplies on pack-horses, and the arrangements were that each would push along on its own account to the Mitchell River, where, at an old camping-ground known to Old Ruck and Bunyip Bill, the one arriving first would await the other.

Morris's men soon got out of our range of vision, and spreading out so as to take in as much ground as possible, with Bunyip Bill on the left flank, while I formed the right about a mile off, we plunged into the wild bush that fringed the lower slopes of the ranges. Half an hour after losing sight of the other party Big Mackay set up a series of shouts that would have done credit to a band of natives, and, riding in on him, we found him wrenching huge irony-looking boulders from a long out-cropping reef.

"A've struck it!" he roared. "The bonniest blue-an'-green copper formation man could wish for—an' there's tons of it."

"Get out!" laughed the Shadow derisively. "That isn't copper. That's antimony that's colourin' the formation."

"Ma man," began Mackay, rising in his wrath, "dae ye think I need a streak o' concentrated bones like you tae tell me onything about copper?"

"Don't argue about that just now," I interrupted. "Peg out the reef, and I'll chart it for future reference. It happens to be a bismuth lode."

Half an hour sufficed to measure, peg out, and place our first property to the credit of the expedition, then we moved on again. Several times during the next hour Bunyip Bill and the Shadow gave vent to sundry exclamations, which caused the others to turn towards them until they were near enough to hear the tenor of their remarks. It was then presumed that they were merely passing their respective opinions anent each other, and had no desire to attract our attention, and we resumed our line of advance again. Just about noon, however, Big Mac,

who occupied the centre of our line, raised his voice in a stentorian shout, and we closed in once more.

"More copper, Mac?" sang out the M.P., as he and I got within speaking distance.

"Copper! Dae ye think there's naething but copper in this God-forsaken country?" bellowed the Scot, pointing to a pile of detached boulders. "There's a crocodile in there as big as a hoose, an' it barks like a dog."

"Lor'!" cried the Shadow, in disgust, "has we came over to see a darned croc?"

"It can't be a crocodile," I said. "Although amphibious, they would scarcely be so far from water. We are at least fifteen miles from the nearest water now."

Mackay cast some of the rocks aside.

"A'm gaun tae hae a look at the deevil noo, ony-way," he said. "Hallo! there he goes. Noo, what dae ye ca' that thing?"

A long, ungainly creature not unlike a crocodile waddled out and glared round at us defiantly, its forked tongue shooting out and in more quickly than the eye could follow, and all insects within a yard disappearing, as if magically, down its throat. Clearly the creature was of the lizard family, but it was by far the largest I had ever seen.

"Lor'!" cried the Shadow, as we dismounted, "Big Mackay has struck an outcrop of iguanas."

"Never mind the poor wee animal," rejoined the big one, as the creature evaded the efforts of Bunyip and the M.P. to catch it. "Look at the stuff its hoose is made of!"

He held up a piece of stone taken from the rocks just vacated.

"That's plumbago," I said, noting the lead-like streak which the substance left on his hand.

"Ye can start a lead-pencil factory now, Mac," laughed Bunyip Bill. "All ye want is wood now ye has got the graphite, and there's any amount of cedar trees back on the river."

"Ma man," began Mackay, "if ye had half the sense o' an eediet ye wad ken enough tae haud yer tongue whiles. Noo, I had a dream last night, an' I dreamt that I was tae find something guid the day when I wadna be lookin' for it. What are ye a' laughing at?"

Mackay looked as if he meant to deal drastically with his tormentors, who were now showering advice upon him in reference to dreams with an amazing fertility of imagination. There was something about the supposed graphite, however, which puzzled me, and the M.P. also seemed not quite satisfied.

"Here's a bee's nest in this tree, Mackay," sang out Shadow. "Maybe these fellows make Scotch whisky out here. I knew a fellow who dreamt that one time down in Cloncurry, an' it must have been a true dream, for he was always cutting out bees' nests after that."

"An' here is a bed of white ants," cried Bunyip. "I reckon I once dreamt they always camp on top of gold."

"Ye pair o' unceevilized insults tae Nature," roared Mac, rushing at the two worthies, "I'll——"

"Get out my porcelain crucible, Mac," I ordered; "this is not graphite."

Big Mac instantly forgot his anger and hastened to unstrap my testing appliances from a pack-horse, and the Shadow and Bunyip came closer. The M.P. had

broken off another piece of the formation in which the iguana had its home, and my pocket-microscope had revealed several peculiarities in the pearly-grey foliated mass that should not be graphite.

“What can it be?” spoke the M.P. “It’s too light for wolfram.”

“Molybdenite streaks porcelain green, according to the text-books,” I answered, “but in all other easily-applied tests it is similar to plumbago or graphite. Give me the crucible, Mac. Ah! there it is——”

A faint greenish streak on the porcelain surface remained where I drew the material across, and I held it up to view.

“Molybdenite! Great howling Bunyip!” exclaimed the Shadow.

“Mac, I apologize,” cried Bunyip Bill. “I reckon you’re the best hand at dreams I knows.”

“Lor’!” muttered the Shadow, “molybdenite is worth a hundred and thirty pounds a ton, too. We’ll be bloated millionaires if Mackay sees any more iguanas.”

“Can you dream again to-night, Mac?” asked the M.P., with immovable face. And after satisfying himself that the late Member of Parliament was really desiring an answer to his question, Mac thought that if the Shadow and Bunyip would take his turn at camp work and cooking he would try. No one would listen to his proposal, however, so Mac resolved to dream no more.

We spent the rest of the day in tracing the “strike” of the lode and in securing the ground according to regulations; but next day, having no water except that remaining in our water-bags, we had to move on. Two days after we reached the Mitchell River, and

found that the other party had not yet arrived. They came in during the night, however, and reported the finding of a phenomenal copper "show," the testing and pegging of which had detained them. They brought some surface samples with them, which, on assaying, proved to be copper oxide ore carrying forty per cent. metallic copper.

We had thus found three properties which might prove of any value in four days, and felt very pleased with ourselves and things in general. So much so, indeed, that we spent the following week in hunting crocodiles and fishing along the banks of the river; but growing tired of an amphibious life—although under a temperature of one hundred and twenty degrees it was very pleasant—we continued our prospecting journey.

Our method of advance was similar to that adopted at first. Both parties separated so as to prospect both sides of the north and south running ranges, with the intention of converging on the Palmer River.

The first three days we travelled fast, preferring, if we were to find good mineral country, to do so in some valley open either to the Gulf of Carpentaria or to the coast *viâ* Laura and Cooktown, as any mines, except gold and osmiridium, could not be made payable in such inaccessible country as that we now traversed. Nevertheless, we were continually discovering lodes of different minerals, and often it took me half a day determining by exhaustive analysis what our finds really were. Thus we proceeded until we had fourteen properties added to our list on our own account, and the men were beginning to think we might as well save time by annexing Northern Queensland at once, when we struck the Palmer. Finding

we were some miles to the east of the appointed place of meeting, we started to move down the river. But the country here was almost impassable, owing to the broken-up nature of the surface and the impeding characteristics of the tropical vegetation. When within a mile of the prearranged camp, Bunyip Bill suddenly startled us by exclaiming:

"Lor'! boys, we've struck the Chinkies. Look! here's a mob of them comin'; get out yer guns!"

"Would you shoot a poor Chinaman, Bunyip?" said the Shadow reproachfully.

"I just reckon I would. They are the dirtiest thieves that ever lived. They would even steal tucker from a nigger; an' what right have they in this country, anyhow? Isn't this Ostralya?"

Bunyip was beginning to wax eloquent on the subject, but the M.P., seeing his chance, imperiously ordered him to be silent, and commenced an address on the necessity of a white Australia.

His lecture was never finished, however, for Big Mackay suddenly shouted:

"A see ane dirty deevil wearing Mr Morris's helmet," and rode to the left to intercept the oncoming rush of yellow men.

"We must have struck one of the abandoned gold-fields of early days," I remarked. "It is well known down south that the Chinamen still work them at a profit."

"I don't care a shandy what they does," yelled the Shadow. "They has been stealing from some white fellows' camp, an', Lor'! I'll bet the M.P.'s hat I have seen the pants that fellow leading is wearing before!"

"Of course you have," cried Bunyip, as the Shadow

seemed lost in the profound depths of recollection. "They was once your own."

"Lor'! an' how did a Chinkey come to have them?" gasped the astonished Shadow. "I reckon I'll see into this."

He galloped after Big Mackay, and recognizing now, as the Chinamen came nearer, several familiar articles, we all started to head them off and investigate. We soon rounded them into a clump of screw pines, and the M.P. demanded where they got his shirt.

"An' whaur did ye steel ma breeks, ye ungodly crew?" Big Mackay roared.

"An' that book on 'How to Feed Children'?" added Bunyip. "I reckon I got it with some pain killer I bought in Margoona."

"Come on, ye confounded Chinkies!" yelled the Shadow, riding among them and assuming possession of some garments by force. "Out with the yarn afore ye has time to think of any Sunday-school stories!"

"We no confoundee Chinkie," cried one of the Celestials in a high falsetto voice. "We all payee poll taxee. We Ostralian allee samee you. No stealee bleeks — no know nothing about feeding childlen. We fight and killee you d——d white fellows you comee hele."

The speaker displayed a revolver as he spoke, and his comrades suddenly produced ferocious-looking knives from some recesses in their garments. There were about a dozen of them altogether, and it looked as if we might have our hands full in dealing with them.

"That is Morris's revolver," I cried. "Give it to me."



Big Mackay

SOME OF OUR PARTY

The Shadow

"Me see you d——d."

"What!" roared Big Mackay, seizing the Chinaman by his pigtail and throwing him to the ground, "you would speak that way to the Boss, would you, ye monkey-faced lisper?"

"Killee him, killee him!" shrieked the fallen man; and his comrades made a rush at the big Scot.

"Don't shoot until they draw blood," shouted the M.P.; "remember the law!"

"Which you darned well helped to make, you fat-headed fool," rejoined Bunyip Bill, clubbing one of the aliens with his rifle. Meanwhile we had all joined in the fray, and as strange a battle as was ever fought raged for five minutes.

The Bunyip and Shadow each fought his opponents in the latest approved fashion. The M.P. threw his man down anyhow, and wherever I saw a yellow head I brought my rifle stock down upon it with an energy I mentally calculated to be more than equal to four thousand foot-pounds per minute. But it was Big Mackay who saved the situation. He caught a Chinaman in each hand as they threw themselves upon him, and, after knocking their heads together and giving them some advice in a wonderful kind of Scotch dialect, threw them into the river. This operation he repeated until he had handled twice as many Chinamen as there were in the original party; then he paused in amazement.

"Michty me!" he exclaimed. "Hoo many deevils are there?"

"Don't stop, Mac," I called out. "They must be getting less."

The others were too much engaged to make any comment bearing on the subject. They did say

several things, however, in that crisp, emphatic language they so often used, and I do hope the Celestials profited thereby. Big Mac continued to throw the slippery, sleek individuals into the river, and I began to wonder if they were coming out of the ground. I was also getting very tired, and the perspiration streamed from my face in torrents, although I did not seem to be as warm as most of the enemy who came under my clubbed rifle—they being so greasy with moisture that the Shadow complained of his difficulty in getting his blow to stop where he wanted it. At length, however, the enigma was solved, and again it was the observant Mac who shone.

“Here’s ane A’ve seen before,” he cried, poising one in mid-air. “I wonder what’s familiar about him?”

He cast him after the others and watched him.

“Ah, A’ve got it noo!” he yelled. “That’s the ane wi’ ma breeks. Gie me back ma breeks, ye deevil. Hallo!” He rushed down to the water’s edge, and then gave vent to an ejaculation of surprise. “He’s no here!” he cried. “Ah! they’re comin’ oot o’ the water as fast as I fling them in, an’ joining in the fecht again!”

“O Lor’!” gasped the Shadow. “What can we do with them?”

“I reckon we’ll have to kill them,” said Bunyip Bill.

“You can’t,” cried the Shadow. “A Chinkey won’t kill. Let us tie them to the palm-trees with their pigtails. Or how would it do to tie all their pigtails together?”

“Good idea, Shadow!” cried the M.P. “And a

hitch round each with a rope afterwards will just about fix them."

This plan was at once acted upon, and very soon the Chinamen were tethered together in a screaming, struggling mass.

"Shut up, ye darned skunks!" roared Bunyip threateningly.

"We killee you. No doing nothing wlong. You no light touchee us. We payee poll taxee—ow——"

The shrieking ceased suddenly, for the Shadow had drawn his sheath knife and made a significant gesture with it.

"This circus has got to stop," he said, "or off come all your darned pigtails."

And the circus did stop, for in Australia, whatever he may think elsewhere, the loss of his pigtail is the greatest calamity that can befall a Celestial.

"Now," I said, addressing the leader, when they realized their position, "tell us how you came to be in possession of these articles, and if you explain satisfactorily, we will let you go."

"You givee you wold?"

"I give my word."

"Oh," began the Chinaman, and we clustered round eagerly, "white fellows come along an' camp along Chinaman's camp. We mine gole hele. By an' by up comes big mob of niggels an' wipe out white fellows."

"What!" we roared.

"Not wipe out zactly. We go help them an' wipe out niggels, an' they give us these plesents."

"And where are they now?"

"Camped down the river all light. You let us go now? You wold!"

"Let them go, boys," I said. "We'll push on."

"Hadn't we better see if they are telling the truth first?" suggested the M.P.

"A'll hae ma breeks, anyway," muttered Mackay. "Nae man had a richt to gie awa' what he only borrowed."

"But we get them plesents," expostulated the Celestial, as my comrades resumed possession of their own.

"And when we hear our comrades' story you will receive their equivalent in cash if you call for it," I said. "It so happens that most of these articles belong to this party, and were only loaned to the others."

The Chinamen jabbered to themselves in their own language, apparently afraid that we would adopt a speedy method of setting them free. But we carefully loosened them by hand, and, after repeating our promise to make a cash payment for our goods if they called for it, we proceeded down the river, whilst they remained watching us. It soon became evident that they had made a mistake in the distance between our comrades' camp and us, for we had left at least six miles behind us ere we came into an area of abandoned surface workings, amidst which were some rude erections fantastically adorned, and which, from the hieroglyphics painted above the doorways, we knew were Chinese stores.

"This place has not been long abandoned," I observed, pointing to the smouldering embers of a fire, on which hung a billy.

"What crook game is the darned Chinkies playing?" demanded the Shadow.

“An’ whaur is Morris and the boys?” asked Big Mac suspiciously.

“Here is the track of Black Bill’s horse,” cried Bunyip. “I know it, ’cos one of its shoes is broken.”

“Then follow it,” I ordered; and we at once headed through the deserted mines farther down the river. We were now in a great state of excitement, and feared that our comrades had been treacherously dealt with by the Chinese, for on no other supposition could we account for the deserted gold mines.

But our suspense was ended before we saw our comrades, for, as we climbed a bluff which barred our progress, we heard Old Ruck’s voice blending with Black Bill’s and Ginger Bob’s in a poetical flow of language which, although unprintable, was as music to us. The Shadow, Bunyip, and the M.P. took up the chorus, actuated by a sort of sympathetic feeling, I suppose, and in the midst of the concert we rode into our comrades’ camp, and I enquired what was wrong.

“Wrong!” growled Black Bill. “We’ve been bested by darned Chinkies.”

“An’ there was no aborigines?” queried the Shadow.

“Nary a one. The Chinks hocussed us, and that’s all.”

“We have been fortunate in finding mineral properties,” began Morris, “but unfortunate otherwise. We struck this camp last night, and knowing that there was a Chinese encampment somewhere near, and being out of one or two little conveniences, we rode into their place and purchased what we required at their store. We all bought some tobacco, and it must have been drugged, for I remember

nothing more after lighting a cigarette I made when we came back until an hour or so ago, when I awoke and found our camp had been robbed. I have just assayed—I mean, analysed—the tobacco, and find that there is some foreign substance in it, but not opium.”

“No,” I said, examining the tobacco; “it contains pidcherie, one of the most potent drugs known. It is found only by the aborigines, from whom the Chinese doubtless stole it. It is a wonder you are alive.”

“Here’s your property, anyhow. We got it back for you,” said the M.P.; and we handed back the articles we had recovered. They were, however, only a part of what had been stolen.

“An’ now we’ve got to go an’ get square with the darned thieves for this,” cried Black Bill gleefully. “Come on, boys!”

“Take your time about that, Bill,” I said. “It strikes me it is not such a simple matter to get square with the Chinese.”

“Just what I was thinking,” said the M.P. “Why have they abandoned their mines, unless it is to catch us there afterwards and get away with us?”

“But, darn them! how could they?” cried Bunyip.

“Trust them for that. They are not by any means so simple as most people think.”

“But the law would hold them answerable. This is Australia we’re in,” cried Ginger.

“Just the point,” answered the M.P. “Australia wants fair play, Chinaman or no Chinaman, and the law looks after them as much as after you or me. If we go into their camp, as they want us to do, it will give them the chance to go for us in self-defence,

and no one in Australia or out of it would think they did wrong.”

“That’s what comes of being an M.P.,” grumbled the Shadow.

We did not then revisit the Chinese encampment ; but we squared matters afterwards.

White, Black, and Yellow

EXCEPTING, perhaps, the Sakis of interior Malayland, the Australian aborigines are generally considered to be the lowest form of humanity on earth. And no wonder. Theirs is a hopeless struggle for existence with reptiles and nameless crawling creatures, and if Nature does grant them any compensation, it is not evident to the white men. In their dreams of a future state, happy hunting-grounds and pleasant waters find no place. Only a dread of devouring bunyips and tormenting ghingis come to their vacant minds. That they are the remnants, or a branch, of a much higher race, even now illustrating the working of the law of reversion to type, on account of their being cut off from external influences, suggests itself to the students of their habits. And those who have witnessed and were capable of understanding the significance of some of their Bora rites or corroborees have no doubt about the matter. It is these weird ceremonies, handed down from the time when the Australian native must have been in contact with the rest of civilized mankind, that causes them to have such a peculiar attraction for many. For the fact remains, that low and debased as they are, there are many things in their common knowledge undreamt of in the present white man's philosophy. But the aboriginal is fast becoming

extinct, and despite the effort of the various states of the Commonwealth to protect them in reservations, it seems likely that in a few years the race will have disappeared. At the present moment, however, they roam the fastnesses of the Leopold Ranges in Western Australia, and the inaccessible divides of the Cape York Peninsula in Queensland, in all their untamed savagery and in those parts the native, if destined to remain in Australia, will find his home. In Northern Queensland the spectacle thus afforded shows the white, yellow, and black men striving for the country; and there are Australian statesmen who, although they dare not express their fear publicly, are of opinion that time will show neither a white North Australia, as is so much desired, nor a black, which the latitude of the country favours, but a huge blot of hateful yellow Chinese.

The Palmer River is about the centre of the scene of this three-sided contest, and having already had an experience with the yellow people there, we were not anxious to fall in with those of any other colour. We had reached the northern limit of our journey, and having found more mineral properties than we knew how to manage, were considering whether we should steer for the Gulf down the river, for the coast on the other side *via* Cooktown, or return by the route we came. Each direction had its own supporters; but our horses being exhausted, and there being a general desire to "get even" with the Chinese, we decided to prolong our departure and let fate decide the way we should go. Accordingly we moved off into the ranges, and, camping on a creek, proposed to have a holiday in hunting anything that came along, biped or quadruped.

Ours was a wonderful camp. Mackay was a man of many parts, and during our stay it transpired that he was a botanist of no mean order. At least he was continually finding plants that no one had ever heard of before, and although many of his finds looked suspiciously like something else, no one could gainsay him. Morris, too, was an ardent collector of all sorts of animals, reptiles, and insects, but he never seemed to think how his fast-growing collection was to be carried away. Old Ruck and Ginger Bob, under the training of the M.P., became strong Socialists, and many and strange were the ideas set forth round our camp-fire at night as to how they would rectify the wrongs of this world. As both thought the entire world consisted of "Ostralya," of which Russia and Japan were some distant parts, and all "life problems" circled round the question of whether drinks should be free or not, an approximate guess of their arguments may be hazarded. Bunyip Bill and the Shadow nightly absented themselves from camp to trap various kinds of animals for Morris; but as they seldom brought in anything but dingoes, wild cats, and opossums, of which Morris could get scores without leaving camp, I suspected they spent their time scouting round the Chinese encampment. To complete the list, I may state that Black Bill studied Geddes's Greek Grammar, and I smoked cigarettes and wondered how the new chum was managing down at Pelican Creek. The Chinese had resumed mining operations on the river, but, so far as we knew, did not know of our whereabouts. One day, however, on going out to round up our horses, we found only their broken hobbles, and then we realized that the

Celestials had been aware of our presence all along, and had now scored again by stealing our horses.

"Well, Boss, if ye means to stand this, we doesn't," spoke Ginger Bob at our council of war. "It's bad enough to give best to Chinkies at one time, but, Lor'! to let them shake our horses!"

"But can't you see that they want us to come after our horses," I said. "They have some trap prepared for us."

"Trap or not, I reckon we can wipe them out with our eyes shut," commented Old Ruck.

"Show me the man that stole ma meesery, an' I'll mak' the population o' this district ane less," growled Mackay.

To my surprise, neither Bunyip nor Shadow said anything on the subject. They looked absent-mindedly into space, and murmured something about being able to see well in the moonlight; and a plan presenting itself to me at that moment, I agreed that we should speedily retaliate and regain our horses. My plan was rather vague. For several nights past we had observed the fires of a tribe of aborigines far down the southern slope of the hill on which we were camped. That they were working northward to join some other tribes in a series of corroborees we had no doubt, but having no desire for trouble, we had kept out of their way while hunting in their vicinity. I had followed the gaze of Bunyip and Shadow over the slope, which in that direction and out on the plain beyond had been cleared of vegetation by a recent bush fire; hence I saw what gave me an idea. The natives had not moved since the previous day, and were now doing something which necessitated much commotion. My glasses now determined that they



BIG MACKAY



OLD RUCK GOING OUT TO LOOK FOR HIS BREAKFAST

were making a large ring of little heaps of brush-wood and excavating a hole in the ground in the centre of the ring. In fact, they were preparing for a corroboree.

"Boys," I said, "it appears to me that our only chance of squaring matters with our yellow friends is by setting the natives against them."

"Lor'! what a first-class idea! Who gave it to ye, Boss?" cried the Shadow, now suddenly becoming full of life and animation. "How will we do it?"

"We'll think that out now."

"That don't need no thinkin'," cried Old Ruck. "We'll sneak up to the Chinese to-night and lay tracks from their camp down to the niggers. In the morning, when the blacks see them, they'll get up on their tails an' go for the Chinkies straight, an' then we can sail in an' get our horses, an' anything else they have that we want, an' clear out for the south."

"Darned good idea that," commented Bunyip.

"It seems feasible," agreed Morris.

"It is all right if it works," spoke the M.P. cautiously; "but won't the natives be able to tell the difference between a Chinaman's track and ours?"

"Lor'! ye is thick even for an M.P.," sneered the Shadow. "Do ye think the nigs will care whose track they follow? They'll be so howlin' mad at being watched that they will go for the first beggars they meet without asking any questions."

"It seems you have it all arranged," I put in, "and as we must have our horses back, we'll put the plan in practice to-night. There are six miles between the two camps, and as we are almost

exactly half-way between on this hill, we should not have much trouble."

"Then we'll go and lay tracks now——" began Bunyip eagerly; but Black Bill threw a stump at him, and he stopped abruptly.

"You'd go and lay tracks now in daylight, would ye, ye darned old idiot," spoke the interrupter, "an' put the Chinese on to the game? Wait till night, an' then drop some broken spears and waddies round their place, so that if they do tumble to the tracks they'll think it's the niggers, and maybe come for them red hot."

"A'm gey feared Bunyip is degenerating," said Mackay. "His cerebrum must be getting affected wi' the heat, or he wadna' be airing such extraordinary wisdom."

Strangely enough, Bunyip did not answer; but, as I was watching him, he administered a kick to the Shadow, who was lying on the ground near him, and, as if in response, the latter gentleman began:

"I don't see why ye should all get on to Bunyip. We have stuck spears and boomerangs everywhere already, and there's a Chinese joss down there I want, and I can't carry it away in darkness."

"Where did you get the spears and boomerangs?" asked Morris.

"From the niggers, of course."

"Oh! Then they know of us?"

Morris's surprise was apparent, but I hid mine. I knew I would get the whole story in time, and I had an impression that it was just as well that I did not know everything. But the Shadow's next words dispelled my suspicions.

"No, the niggers don't know of our being here," he said, and not another word would he utter.

Fully determined as to the course we should pursue—for we could not leave without our horses, nor could we ever dare tell any other prospector that we had allowed the Chinese to beat us, even although we knew they had some trap set for us—we lay around our camp until sundown, and then hastily prepared supper. The moon would not rise until nine o'clock, so, leaving our camp, we walked down the hill until we reached a flat, across which a track between the Chinese and native camps would naturally pass. The boys then started off for the river, intending to come back over their own tracks, and thus make them easily evident to the aborigines. They preferred to go without either Morris or me; and having reasons for believing that that was perhaps the better plan, we did not demur, but made our way carefully in the direction of the native camp, so as to make out a track for the others when they returned. The night was silent and sultry, and from the absence of insect life I judged that a thunderstorm was at hand. Knowing that it would be two hours before our comrades could be back at the native camp, we walked on slowly, keeping our eyes fixed meanwhile on a circle of dull, gleaming lights, which marked the stage on which the weird rite of a corroboree was soon to be played. We got within a quarter of a mile of the grand fiery circle, and, not thinking it wise to go any nearer, we sat down on a fallen iron-bark tree to await the others.

"I didn't know they lit their big circle until the night of the highest corroboree," said Morris. "All

their heaps of brushwood will burn away in no time."

"Oh, they cover the fires with ashes, and preserve them until required," I answered. "Then their fiends or wizards fan them into flames by some means known only to themselves. I wonder why they are so quiet! One would think they were preparing for the seventh or manhood test corroborree to-night. What's wrong?"

Morris had caught my arm suddenly, and was now bent in a listening attitude. I held my breath and listened too, and the patter of naked feet upon the ground sounded out close beside us.

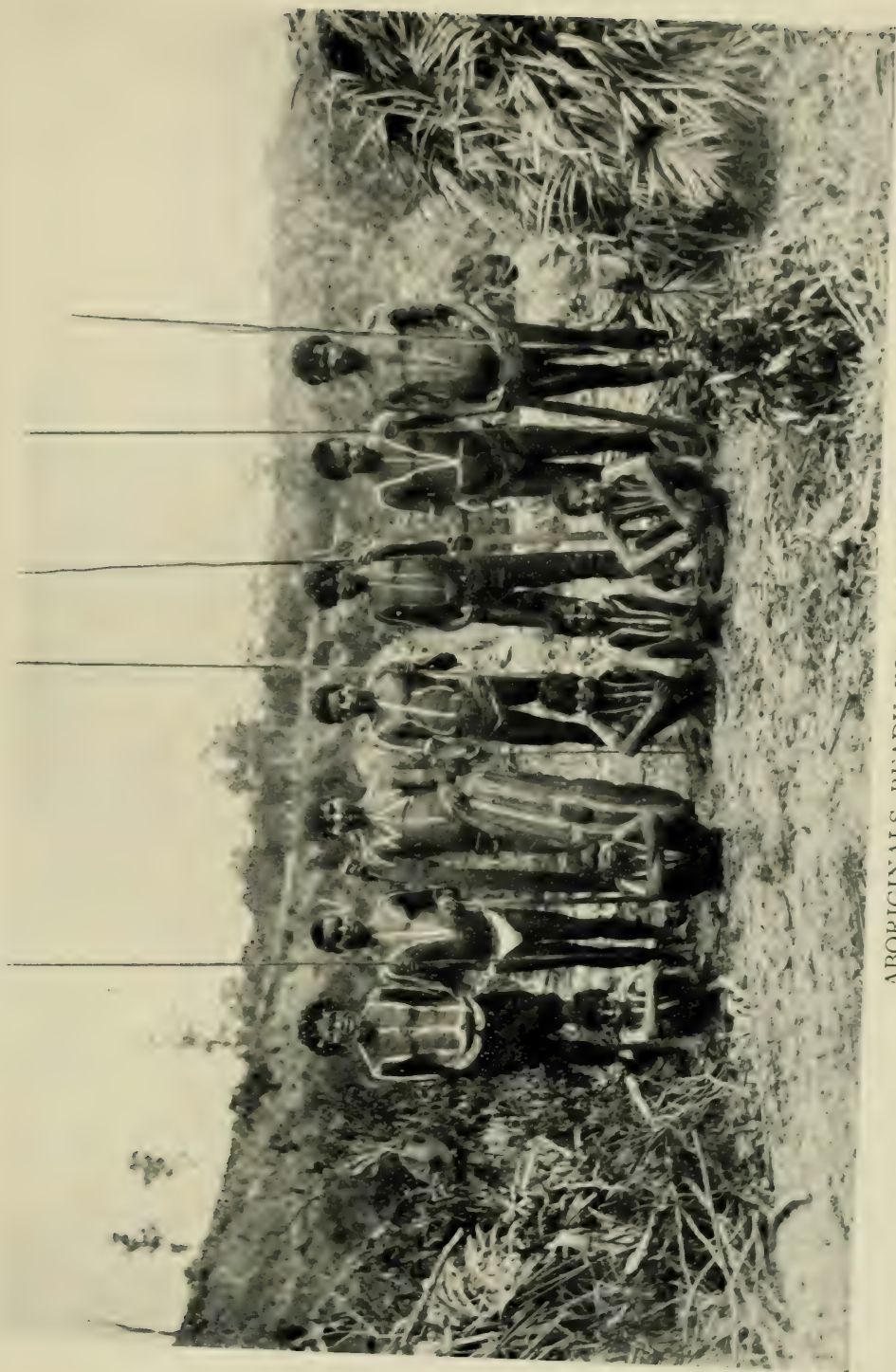
"We are caught," my comrade whispered. "This must be the night of their high corroborree, and these fellows are the sentries."

We sat still and waited. Nearer and nearer the warriors came. There were at least half a dozen of them, but their black forms were lost in the inky darkness of a tropical Australian night.

"Whitby hog-o-wog-a-ga," we heard one say, which, translated as nearly as possible, meant, "White fellows have come about here."

"Hims budgerie. Hims baba ghinghi cumbi," one of the others responded; and I shuddered, for the nearest meaning I could get to these words was, "They are good to eat. We want them for water devil."

They were now but a few feet away from us, and still they jabbered on in half-intelligible language about the great king Nulla Dulla having come to life again, and the importance of some high corroborree in the gidgha flat. We each had drawn our revolvers noiselessly, and I waited for the moment when they



ABORIGINALS READY FOR A CORROBORREE

would stop speaking to fire, for I knew that the first sign we would have that they had discovered us would be a spear thrust. But they did not pause ; and while we held our breath they passed, unconsciousness of our presence. I had put out my hand so as to feel when one approached within arm's length, and my fingers actually touched the greasy shoulder of a native. The finger of my other hand was already pressing the revolver trigger, but that native never knew his narrow escape. He sprang forward when he felt my hand, and, shrieking out something about the bunyip, sped away into the darkness, followed at breakneck speed by his companions.

I explained to Morris what had happened, and added that, from their language, I knew it was a tribe of southern blacks with which we had to deal.

"But how did they know we were camped near here?" asked Morris.

"Perhaps the Shadow or Bunyip can tell you," I answered, "but I cannot. Ah, look ! The corroboree is to be held to-night. The wizard men are doctoring the fires."

At that moment an unearthly wailing sound rang out on the still night atmosphere, and I at once recognized the ghinghi-ghinghi (devil-devil, a peculiar shaped piece of wood fluted, so that when swung round the head by a leather thong it emits strange sounds).

Then there was a shrill babel of female voices ; and a great pattering of feet, accompanied by the rustling of ti-tree leaves and the crackling of scrub, announced that a large body was bearing in our direction.

"O Lord !" cried Morris, "we're done this time."

"Not quite," I laughed. "These are only the gins

running away. They dare not witness such a corroboree as will be held to-night, and the law is, that any woman found within sound of the ghinghi-ghinghi will instantly be speared. That is what the sentries are out for. But crawl into the bank of this creek. They will rush over us."

We were not a minute too soon in getting under cover; and while we fought blindly with snakes and wild cats for their home under the banks, the mob of gins thundered over our heads, and when we emerged the moon had appeared above the horizon, and the corroboree had commenced. I had seen several corroborees before—never by permission—in Western and Central Australia, and consequently knew at once the degree of the present one. A corroboree really means a council, but the important councils are only held in connection with the sacred rites of the Bora. The name has changed its significance somewhat. The highest corroboree still worked is, I believe, the one held by the tribe to initiate young warriors into the mysteries of manhood. This consists of a series of tests of physical endurance, culminating in a march round and through the circle of fires. In this test those who are unable to withstand the pain are either given over as sacrifices to some of the many demons or otherwise summarily dealt with, whilst those who go through successfully at once go out with their waddies (clubs) to look for their future wives!

The corroboree now in full swing before us seemed rather elementary compared with some I had seen; but the presence of some natives fantastically adorned with snake, kangaroo, and emu skins—bunyip-men, as they are called—was a sign that developments might take place later.

We crawled closer, knowing that it was safer near at hand than out where the guards might stumble over us.

In the centre of the fiery ring were two bands of men painted with white stripes across their bodies, facing each other, and performing sundry evolutions with interlaced hands. Then they would break their formation, and, squatting down, would imitate kangaroos, then emus, and finally snakes. We had now wriggled to a point within fifty yards of the fire-lit zone, and, lying flat on the ground, we tried to catch the words of a chant all were mumbling. Suddenly the ghinghi-ghinghi sounded out shrilly, and a grotesquely-dressed being stepped into the ring swinging the instrument round his head. Instantly everything stopped, and the ring was cleared. A silence, but for the wailing of the ghinghi, ensued for about a minute, then into the ring from opposite corners rushed two opposing bands of warriors, and the air resounded with the thud of spears upon waddies and boomerangs upon heads. This was a part I had never seen played before, and at first I thought it really was two tribes settling their disputes in chivalric fashion for the benefit of the onlookers, but the fire-tenders at this point ran round the fires and scattered some leaves thereon, with the result that a pungent black smoke rose and shrouded those inside the ring from view. When it cleared away all inside were lying on the ground as if in a pidcherie-induced sleep, and I was wondering what was coming next, when a double dingoes' howl rang out behind us.

"There are the boys," I exclaimed to Morris, who appeared to be fascinated with what he saw.

"Look at that fellow crawling across the ring with a knife," he said. "I wonder what he is going to do?"

"I don't know," I answered, giving the answering signal, "but I know what I am going to do."

"Come on, Boss," whispered the M.P., a few paces in our rear; "the track is laid, and the boys are waiting back in the scrub."

"But they must draw the natives after them," I exclaimed.

"No need; they're coming now," was the response; and it was true. The man with the knife suddenly gave vent to a howl of anger and began jabbering excitedly to his fellows, and next moment a horde of black demons sprang to their feet and came towards us at a pace which made our chance of running far hopeless indeed. We did run, nevertheless, and to our surprise the natives did not follow us, but, running off at a tangent, appeared to find some tracks which pleased them greatly, and in five minutes were well on their way to the river.

"Whom are they following?" I cried. "And where are our people?"

"Boss, I am not in the know," answered the M.P. "There is some game on, but they didn't let me into their confidences. Hallo! who is this?"

The M.P. sprang forward suddenly. There was a scuffle, and then two forms rolled over on the ground. Morris and I ran to his assistance, but he did not seem to require any aid, and with a laugh turned his man over and looked at him.

"It's a nigger," he said. "I hope he is not a Socialist."

"It's the fellow we saw with a knife," cried Morris, as the moonlight fell on his face. "Good Lord! he's talking English."

"What for this?" spluttered the naked warrior. "White fellow, hims no play straight."

The M.P. slackened his grip, and the native sat up.

"Who are you?" I cried; then, remembering the vernacular, "What's hims name?"

"Hims name Big Fellow Governor - general Ostralya," he answered proudly. "Hims get him name at Cairns from Big Fellow King. Hims no d——d black fellow nigger. Hims like whisky and bacca, an' big fellow one way white fellow, and little fellow all way white fellow, tell him hims get bacca an' tucker an' couple o' bob if hims make warriors go for d——d chows. My word! we went for them."

The chief paused exultantly, and the M.P. handed him his pipe and tobacco, which, with a remarkable celerity, were put into working order, and the dusky gentleman in extreme contentment closed his eyes and blew clouds of smoke into the air.

The M.P. and I easily understood the Big Fellow Governor-general's conversation, and when we explained that "big fellow one way" meant the Shadow, and "little fellow all way" Bunyip Bill, Morris understood too.

"Then all the trail-making business was needless," he exclaimed.

"You can go nap on that," laughed the M.P. "Bunyip Bill and Co. were not taking any risks. They had arranged matters with his lordship here, and all the talk was merely to get the Boss to think he was engineering the game."

"We'd better get back to the camp at once," I said. "This is a serious matter, and there is no telling how it will end."

"Big Fellow Governor-general Ostralya come too," spoke the native, as we prepared to move.

"I don't think you are," I said.

"My word! Hims come for couple o' bob an' whisky an' more bacca." Then, seeing that we paid no attention to his words, "Hims better come. D——d black fellow come back for meet white fellow. They wipe them out too."

"Oh! Don't they know we're here?"

"No fear. Bad black fellows this. Big chief Nulla Dulla, Boss, kill all white fellows. Hims no like him. Hims want go be your horse-boy for bacca an' tucker an' couple o' bob."

At this moment we heard the sound of horses' hoofs galloping over the iron-stone shot ground, and as they came nearer Ginger Bob's voice rang out:

"Coo-ee! Where the tarnation is ye?"

"Coo-e-e!" we signalled back; and he rode up.

"It's time we were not here, Boss," he cried. "We've got all our horses, and the circus has started."

"You bring him bacca an' couple o' bob——" began the aboriginal.

"Darn it!" roared Ginger, turning angrily to the M.P., "and this is what you make of Australia. Even allowing niggers to talk English. I don't reckon I am a Socialist any more."

"Never mind that now," I said. "Lead on to the others. I want some points explained."

"I don't reckon anything's wrong, Boss," began

Ginger. But I cut him short, and we walked on until we met our comrades riding towards us and leading the spare horses.

"Shadow," I said, when we halted, "what is the meaning of all this? Do you know what you've done?"

"You bet, Boss, and we've broken no law, for Ginger and Old Ruck got the M.P.'s opinion on that aforehand."

"But you arranged with the natives to attack the Chinamen?"

"No, Boss; I only told that fellow there that the Chinamen were to go for this, their first corroborree, and steal all their pidcherie when they were asleep."

"And——"

"And we knew it would be to-night. And we knew that neither you nor the New Chum nor the M.P. would allow that the game was fair, and we had to get our horses somehow."

"But the natives will murder all the Chinamen!"

"Well, serve them right. They started the fight. There was not a Chinkey in their camp when we got there. They were all out round the natives, for we saw their tracks."

"What is that you have on the pack-horse behind?"

"A Chinese joss, Boss. I thought the New Chum would like it for his collection."

"Here's the niggers coming," shouted Old Ruck.

We stayed not on the order of our going, but giving the Big Fellow Governor-general all our spare tobacco, started at once. I never found out exactly how the Shadow and Bunyip engineered the three-sided fight, although I suppose they tempted the

Chinese with pidcherie which Big Fellow had supplied. And hearing afterwards from various sources that several small prospecting parties had disappeared in the vicinity of the same Chinese camp, I ceased having any compunctions regarding the matter.

How we held Mackay's Find

THE interior of Northern Queensland is by no means a pleasant country, and, notwithstanding its vast mineral wealth, most people experience a feeling of gladness when a chance occurs for them to leave its sun-scorched sands and limestone bluffs for a time. I felt very much in that state of mind as we made our way southward from the Palmer River, and that the others also looked forward to a change became apparent when we reached the Walsh River.

We were now within a day's journey of Pelican Creek, and about ten miles west from the first reef discovered by Mackay on our outward journey. We had in all located and pegged out twenty-five properties on our trip, including prospective mines of almost every mineral found in the country. We had now only to send in formal application for the various leases and pay the ten shillings an acre rent required by the Government. That done, the properties became ours to do with as we pleased so long as we fulfilled the labour laws regarding them. But we had no intention of fulfilling the labour laws, and even the M.P. agreed that it would be much more convenient if we could escape doing so and still hold our ground against "jumpers." I thought we could do this until we had arranged to dispose of our

mines by sale or agreement, for we could not possibly work them all ourselves, even if we did not wish to lease the country. We knew, however, that it would never do for us all to ride into Murgoona. That would attract too much attention from the class of people who made their living by claim-jumping and other sharp practices. It was therefore decided that Morris should go in himself and go right through by train to Atherton, thence on to Herberton, to the warden's office, and file our applications, Black Bill and the M.P. also going in to Murgoona to bring out stores enough to last the camp pending the granting of the leases.

The morning following our arrival at the river the three men departed on their various missions, and we made a course for Mackay's Find, as Big Mac's first discovery had been designated among ourselves. We got there in the evening, having been delayed considerably by not recognizing the country, which was now covered by long spear grass about six feet high. The next day we stripped the lode to prove its width, and to our surprise found that a parallel seam of copper formation ran alongside, about three feet from the bismuth or main lode. Such luck was truly phenomenal, and it was with a feeling that we had far more mineral properties on hand than we could deal with for a long time to come that we built a camp of scrub and awaited the arrival of stores.

"I reckon a spell down south, where we can get something different from tinned dog and parrot pie to eat, would be a darned good thing just now," remarked the Shadow, as we sat at supper the evening of the second day.

I did not respond, but my thoughts flew to the dining saloon of a P. & O. liner. We had been living too long on hard fare, and a change would be welcome.

"Was ye ever in New Zealand, Ginger?" enquired Bunyip, wiping the perspiration from his face.

"Not that I know of. Whereabouts is it?"

"Oh, ye turn to the left at Sydney, an' get there in four and a half days."

"Couldn't ye take spare horses and do it faster?"

"No ; the water beats ye."

"It wouldn't beat me. I reckon I could carry all the water Old Nugget an' I would need."

"Man, Ginger, ye are a gem," laughed Mackay. "Noo, I believe you are just the man that could ride tae New Zealand if the water wad only freeze, an' maybe Old Ruck wad go also."

"Well, what about the place, anyhow?" enquired Old Ruck, who did not clearly understand Mackay's reference to the water freezing.

"Oh, it's a darned good place for a spell," continued Bunyip. "The old sun never gets above ninety, an' the skeeturs ain't worth nothing. There's plenty of tucker running about, an'—— Lor' ! what's that?"

"Only a death adder," said Old Ruck, who was becoming interested in Bunyip's description. He killed the venomous creature, which had been sleepily trying to wriggle into Ginger's trousers' pocket, and was about to request Bunyip to continue his narrative when Ginger ventured upon some characteristic remarks anent reptiles in general, and when he had finished every one felt too hot to say anything.

"There are a darned amount of wrigglers in this

country," said the Shadow thoughtfully, after a long interval. "Suppose we cook them. They'd feel much better dead."

"Get out, man! Hoo can ye catch the creatures tae cook them?"

"Easy enough," responded Shadow. "Watch me."

He rose as he spoke from his seat on a piece of copper oxide, and, seizing a burning brand from our fire, walked over to the edge of the clearing on which our camp stood. Next moment he threw the flaming log among the long dry grass, and with the roar of a terrific hurricane a wall of flame instantaneously shot up around us, and receded in an ever-widening circle. Birds and animals aroused from their slumbers, or startled from their night prowling missions, raced away in front of the scorching flames, their cries resounding through the sultry night air like sounds from another world. Down to the river spread the flames, where they fought to force a passage across; but their spasmodic leaps finally became quenched in the stagnant waters, and, leaving a charred track right to the river's edge, they sped along the bank. Soon the roar of the flames died away, and ere many minutes had passed only the crackling of the dry scrub as the flames caught it, and the distant crashing of large iron-bark trees as they fell to the ground, indicated that a bush fire was in progress. All night long, however, a lurid glow illumined the northern sky, and it was many weeks before that fire finally burned itself out.

For some time we stood watching the fiery scene, almost scorched by its hot breath; but the Shadow at length broke the silence by saying: "I don't

reckon there will be many pests troubling us to-night." And he was correct.

Next day we continued our development work, and were all variously engaged along the line of reef when a shout from Old Ruck brought us all to a point behind our camp, from which we could command the river valley for many miles.

"Look there!" he said; and, astonished beyond measure, we gazed in the direction he indicated, and saw a long, straggling line of camels, laden with stores, and a number of horsemen coming towards us.

"There must be a new 'rush' somewhere near," I remarked. "I can recognize some of the Murgooona people among the riders."

"Then we'll be into it," exclaimed Shadow, fired with the excitement we had so often felt before.

"Nonsense!" I said. "Are you aware that we would require to employ over one hundred men to work the ground we already hold in accordance with the labour laws of Queensland?"

"They're coming here," shouted Mackay. "Will we fecht?"

"No," I answered. "They can only be desiring information."

We watched the approaching crowd until the leaders drew rein beside us.

"Good-day, mates!" said one, dismounting. "Whereabouts is the 'rush'?"

"What 'rush'?" I asked.

"Oh, come down a bit! We're here now, an' that shows the game's bursted. Where is the lode?"

"I hardly understand you. There is no 'rush' near here that we know anything about."

"Oh, all right!" He turned to the crowd that

now surrounded us. "They are going crook on us, boys, so help yourselves."

There was a shout of approval, and at once the men dismounted and scattered over our property, driving in boundary pegs by the dozen, without regard to the fact that our posts already surrounded the whole.

"Are you not a bit rash?" I said to the leader. "It is our ground, and there will be trouble over this."

"An' that right now," added Big Mackay. "I'll tak' ony half-dozen o' ye."

"I reckon Bunyip an' I can take our weight out of any four of ye," supplemented the Shadow.

"An' I'll pulverize the rest," cried Ginger; and Old Ruck, not thinking it necessary to say what he would do, laid violent hands on the nearest enemy.

"Oh, we'll fight ready enough!" laughed the leader.

"But not with us," I said calmly. Then, turning to my own party, I ordered them not to raise a hand to defend the ground, as any work the others might do on it would only save us trouble, and they could not possibly raise any ore that would pay to cart away to the nearest smelters at C——.

"Oh, you needn't bet on the racket of offering no resistance and depending on the Government to stand by you!" spoke the leader, as he gathered what I had said. "The Labour Party is in now, and no darned English capitalists are going to get hold of any land without manning it."

"We are manning this property."

"Maybe you are an' maybe you're not. Anyhow,

here we are, an' here we stays till better than ourselves throws us off."

A gleam of ferocious joy lit up Big Mackay's face.

"A'll no alloo that ony man on this field—bar the Boss—is better than me," he said. "An' I am open to assert that if ye'll just staun oot for a meenit or twa in a freendly sort o' wey, I'll prove that you are no much better than a miskeety."

"I can't afford the luxury of a personal quarrel with you, Scottie," returned the stranger, "nor can ye tempt me into it just now, although ye are big and ugly enough to get on most people's nerves."

He led his horse over to our workings as he spoke, and with difficulty I restrained Mackay from following. I had much trouble in talking my comrades into a reasoning frame of mind, but finally succeeded in convincing them that a policy of sitting tight and raising no trouble was the best plan; and this much allowed, we had dinner, and then went about the lease as if in undoubted possession. Four of the men had set to work where we had uncovered the main lode, and were fast shooting a hole down under it, while some others had started to sink on the parallel lode. The rest were fixing camp, cooking dampers, or wandering rather aimlessly about their claims with picks.

"Ye don't seem to worry much," the man who apparently acted as leader said to me, as I stood smoking beside the "open cut" and watched them.

"Why should I?" I replied. "You are doing our work for us."

"Are you quite sure of that?"

"Oh, I think so! We have sufficient men on the ground to hold it."

"Then ye has abandoned all your other shows?"

"What other shows?"

"Oh, you know best! There were nine men in your party, and you are trying to hold over two dozen leases with them."

"Who on earth told you that?"

"Then it's true?"

"Not necessarily. But who told you?"

"Will ye strike a deal?"

"On what?"

"This." He held up a piece of ore from the underlay. "If you think the information as to who told us worth getting, we think it only fair for you to tell us what this stuff is in exchange."

"Don't you know?"

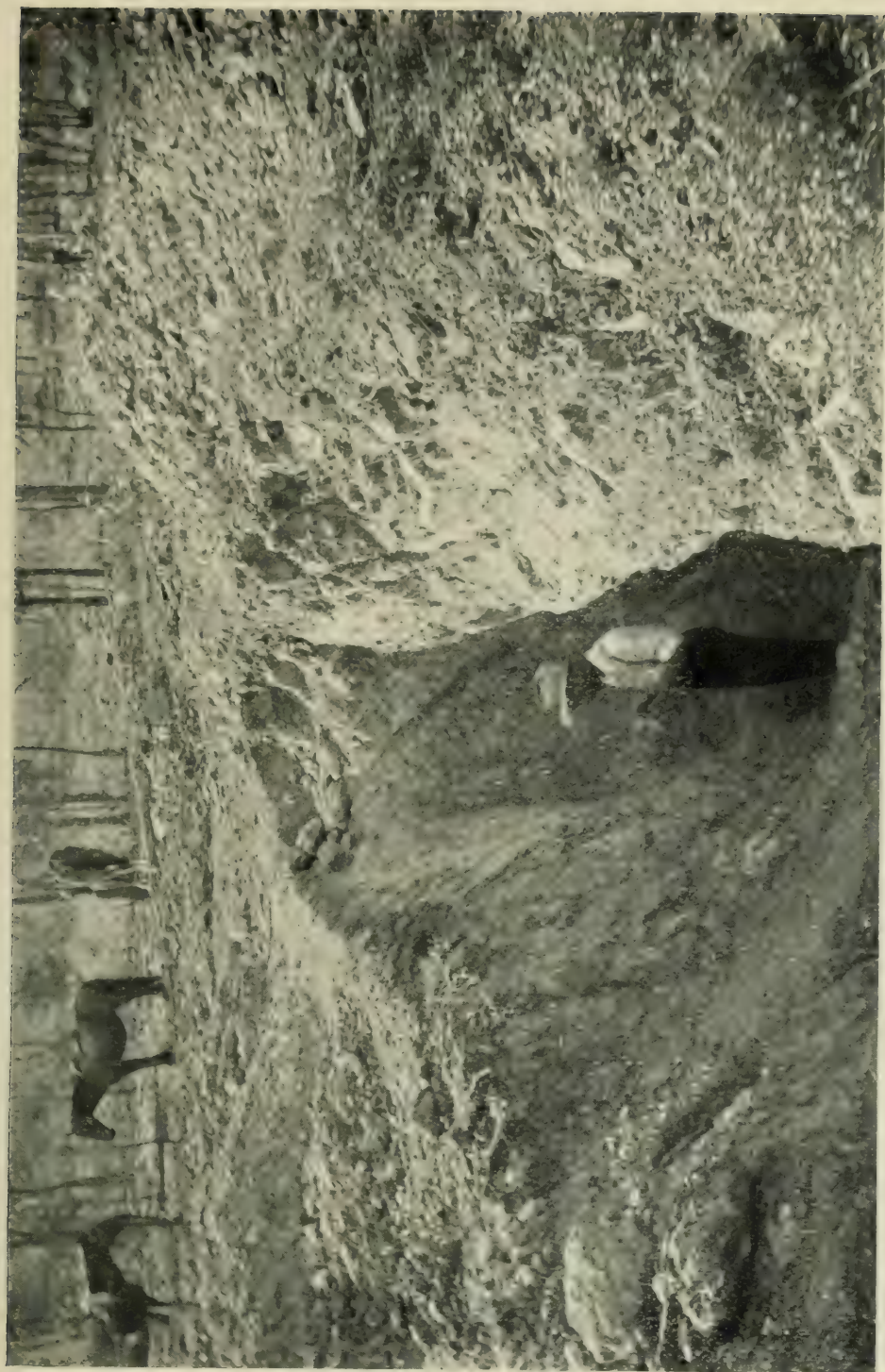
"Not exactly. Are you on?"

"Yes. That is bismuth, and the other lode over there is copper, but only ten-per-cent. stuff. Now it is your turn."

"The way we got to know of this was through a fellow called Bill Mauley or Black Bill. He got drunk when he struck Murgoona the other night, and reckoned he was interested in a party that had annexed half of Northern Queensland. We knew he was one of your crowd, so we followed the tracks back to the Walsh River. We lost them there last night, and were just reckoning he had beat us with his yarn about one show being near the river, when we saw a bush fire burst out, an' then we knew that that must be you fellows clearing away the grass round your camp."

"Was there no other person with Black Bill?"

"Yes, D——, the M.P. But when he saw he couldn't stop Bill from yarning, he just filled him full



THE UNDERLIE OF THE ADMIRAL
(Note the dip of the lode in end of open cut)

up to the top with stagger juice until he couldn't speak a word."

"A darned pity he didn't fill him up first," spoke Ginger, at my elbow, and I felt inclined to agree with him.

"Ah, well!" I said, "I would really like to see you fellows get along all right—not on this property, of course, but farther up, or down, the river; but I fear the country around here is not rich enough to be payable without expending a great deal of capital. There is not much of a market for bismuth, you know."

"Then what do you mean to do?"

"Wait to see what the formation is like when these bismuth and copper lodes join. They should join if they are going down at about the fifteen-foot level, and you should be down there in a few days if you don't waste valuable time."

"Easy there, mate. What in tarnation is it to you whether we waste time or not? Don't you reckon it's pretty cool knocking round smoking, jist waiting for us fellows to sink a hole for you to see what's at the bottom?"

"Well, the alternative is plain."

"We can consider ourselves sacked, I suppose?"

"You can."

"But we won't."

"Then continue sinking the hole for my benefit."

"See here, Boss, you are darned aggravatin'. We don't allow that this is yours, you know."

"Oh yes! I had forgotten that little mistake of yours."

"It ain't no mistake," growled another man, a parchment-faced individual with abnormally-developed shoulders. "An' see here! We is backed by

gentlemen in town who can put up as much money as you, an' here we'll stay until you leave, anyhow. I am tellin' ye, too, I am the bad character of these parts. My handle is Broken-Nose Peter, and I usually stand on my tail about this time every day."

"Oh, I don't mind though you hang from a tree by your appendage! I have heard of you before——"

"Say, Boss," broke in the first stranger, "there is no call to get rusty over things. There is plenty more ground round here your party can peg out. We've beat you this time, and you should recognize that fact."

"Very well, then," I said, turning away, "when you have quite decided that this stuff here will not pay you for your labours, you might let me know. Meanwhile, if you will give me a piece of that last formation you've struck there I'll assay it for you, and let you know its value."

"Fair and square?" asked the men.

"Fair and square," I repeated; and at once a sample from the deepest part of the underlay was handed up to me.

I walked over to my tent, and soon the Shadow and Mackay joined me. Ginger, Bunyip, and Old Ruck, having discovered an æsthetic pleasure in watching other men working, were helping them with advice. The usual test to find the percentage of metallic copper in an ore is very simple, consisting merely of dissolving a measured quantity of powdered ore in hot nitric acid, adding ammonia until the solution turns blue, and then, by carefully measuring the amount of a standard solution of cyanide of potassium necessary to decolorize the ammoniated

solution, a figure is arrived at, from which, by comparison with known results now well standardized, the correct proportion is obtained. It was soon evident to me that the copper contents of the specimen were not very great for that part of the world, and when I had worked out the calculation, nine per cent. was the proportion of copper to the whole. That, certainly, would not pay, as a ten-per-cent. ore was only worth five pounds a ton in North Queensland at the time, and it would cost three pounds a ton to cart the ore to the nearest smelters at C——, where the big company would absorb the rest for smelting charges and other expenses known only to smelting companies. But there was more than copper in the specimen, and another careful test proved that sixteen ounces of silver were also hidden away in a ton of the ore. This should be all profit, seeing that the copper paid all other charges. Again I tried the remainder of the specimen, and this time I used both nitric and hydrochloric acids to dissolve the substance, for I was looking for gold. And it was there to the extent of five pennyweights to every ton.

"Try for something else now, Boss," said the Shadow, who was quite familiar with the tests for various metals. "I reckon you'll get a lot of other things in that."

"There is quite sufficient in it already," I said, "to make it worth fighting for. I am going over now to tell the men the result of the assay."

"What! Are you going to tell them what is in it?"

"Yes; I promised I would. And then we'll leave this place for a time."

"Man, Shadow, ye should haud yer tongue when

ye speak," reproved Mackay, who had caught my intention. "Dae ye no see that if ye tell these folk that there's gold here and then leave ourselves, they'll think we ken the place is no worth onything, an' only tell them that tae try an' mak' them work for nothing."

"I see, I see!" roared the Shadow delightedly. "Come on an' we'll tell them now. Hallo! here's Ginger."

"What is this stuff, Boss?" asked Ginger, coming in at that moment with another specimen. "The men have bottomed our underlay on that dirty-looking tack, an' told me to tell ye."

"It carries half an ounce of gold," I replied, after a hurried test, "but it is poorer in copper."

"Lor'!" was all Ginger's comment; but he said a great deal more when I told him to find Bunyip and Old Ruck and start shifting our camp.

Soon after I went down to where I had got the specimen, and addressed the man whom I had supposed to be the leader of the party.

"That specimen I took away from here carried nine per cent. of copper."

"Was that all? Lord! that wouldn't pay."

"No; that is what I told you, if you remember. It also carried sixteen ounces of silver."

"Just enough to make money for the smelters."

"And five pennyweights of gold."

"Get out! I knew you would try to do us."

"I am not trying to do you. Hallo! I see you have cut the junction of the bismuth and copper lodes. There is probably more gold and less copper in that stuff downwards."

"See here, Boss, what do you mean?"

"Exactly what I said. We're leaving the ground

to you after all—at least for a time. When you are done with it we may come back.”

I walked away again, and as darkness fell we packed our tents on the horses and removed half a mile up the river, where we again camped.

That night the Shadow and Bunyip scouted down the banks of the river, and reported to me that a rider with a spare horse had left the other camp at top speed.

“I suppose he went in to get that stuff assayed,” added the Shadow, when he gave me the information.

“I suppose so,” I agreed.

“But won’t that spoil our little game?” asked Bunyip.

“You don’t know the — company and their assayers,” laughed Mackay. He evidently knew them as well as I did, for he had no fears of the result.

Two days afterwards a party of the other miners came up to our camp.

“Say, Boss, will you give anything to get that ground we’re on?” asked our old friend.

“No, I don’t think so,” I answered. “Why do you wish to sell?”

“It is no darned good to us, an’ seeing we’ve put your shafts down for you, we thought you might be willing to buy us out.”

“So you are quite convinced it is of no value.”

“Well, no ; we don’t put it that way, or we couldn’t expect you to buy it. But it is worth nothing to us, for our backers have left us over that assay we got in——”

“I understand——”

“Here is Morris and the M.P. coming riding like willy-willies,” cried Bunyip. “Lor’! they is in a hurry!”

"An' there are some other Johnnies making for the old ground," cried the Shadow. "O Lor'! they are — people!" He fairly shouted the last words, and I understood at once.

"Men," I said, turning to the miners, "I can't give you anything for our own ground, but I'll employ you all at double the standard wage, and pay you for the work you have already done."

I turned away to conceal my anxiety while the men considered the proposition. Morris was frantically waving a long envelope in his hand, and both his horse and the M.P.'s were exhausted.

"Get over at once, Shadow," I said, "and make the men work for you, no matter what the terms are."

"It's all right, Boss," here exclaimed the leader of the miners. "We don't know how you can afford to pay what you say, but that isn't our business, and we accept."

"Then you'll say you've been working for me all along, and if anything comes of the venture you shall have as many shares as I can afford divided amongst you."

The men raised a series of cheers at this announcement, and I turned to meet Morris.

"Here are the papers of application," he gasped. "The news of gold being found is all down the line. We came on through the night, but a party of — people were ahead of us, and we only caught sight of them a mile back. They say you abandoned the property."

We wasted no time in conversation, and in a few seconds every man who could catch a horse was flying towards the old camp.

The party of — people got there a minute or so ahead of me, and were now excitedly running about.

"This is our ground," one of them screamed, and looking closely I recognized —, a satellite of the —'s assayer.

"This notice makes the ground ours, I think," I said, "and if you have any objections you will now have to lodge them in the Wardens' Court."

"But you abandoned the ground for over forty-eight hours without being granted exemption. You have not fulfilled the labour laws."

"Man, ye're a braw eediot," spoke Mackay. "How many men wad ye like us to hae on the ground?"

"You had no men. These men are not yours, and they have accepted our offer to buy them out——"

"You're a d——d liar," cried the leader of the miners. "We have accepted no offers from any one, and we're workmen employed by the Boss here."

"But your assay : it carried gold?"

"Yes, so the Boss told us, and we didn't believe him, and sent it to your people. And now you thought you had an easy thing on. Here, boys, suppose we fire them?"

"No," I ordered. "Post up these application notices instead."

Prospecting on the Gem-Fields

THERE is still a land sacred to the pioneer, a land where neither syndicates nor limited companies exist, and where fortunes are frequently made by "one stroke of the pick." This land of promise is in the great Australian desert on the west of Queensland and New South Wales. The aborigines know it as the Never Never country. At best it is a region of dreary desolation, on which the sun shines with terrific heat by day, and where by night innumerable pests make life almost unbearable. But it is the Eldorado of the fortune-seeker, for with grim sarcasm Nature has gifted that inhospitable waste with a wealth of precious opal, and who can resist the allurements of that blood-flashing gem?

The probable opal-bearing district extends throughout the latitudes 22° to 31° south, and from 125° to 146° east longitude; but the resources of the vast desert to the west of Cooper's Creek have not yet been prospected. At present the chief centres are at White Cliffs, in New South Wales, and at Eromanga, Winton, Fermoy, Duck Creek, and Koroit, in Queensland.

Opal is a vari-coloured gem which until recently was regarded with superstitious awe, its powers of emitting ever-changing flashes of fire being associated

with the underworld. Now, however, the beautiful stone is most popular, and its living tints of iridescent splendour are fancifully supposed to represent the various emotions of the human heart.

At White Cliffs there has sprung up a township of over three thousand inhabitants, all of which are engaged directly or indirectly in pursuit of the precious gem. Opal was, and is, found here in parallel layers or seams at various depths down to about forty feet. There are absolutely no surface indications to guide one, but within a radius of many miles one cannot miss "striking" opal of some grade if a vertical shaft be sunk.

The opal is bought from the miners in the rough by certain Germans and Jews who reside in the town. They pay for it prices ranging from two pounds per ounce to the "new chum" up to perhaps thirty sovereigns to the experienced miner, who knows its value and the characteristic traits of the buyers. The average value of the gem, however, is about ten pounds per ounce, and as it is quite a common occurrence to break through a matrix-seam carrying anything under one hundred ounces, it is at once evident that "opalling" has some advantages over gold-mining.

One needs neither money nor experience to start operations at White Cliffs. The store-keepers will readily provide the necessities of life until the new chum "strikes it," and a pick, rope, and bucket are all that is required in the way of tools, although a crude windlass is generally added when one takes on the indispensable mate. But White Cliffs is not now what it once was. Encouraged by the many reports of fortunes made and the comparative ease

with which the fields could be reached from Sydney and Adelaide, the "disreputables" from the various Australian capitals have rushed the place. Drinking and gambling saloons are in full swing, and life there is now as fast and furious as that in any American "boom" town. The output of opal is still kept up, but it is no longer the work of the prospector. He likes not the banding together of men, and the close, fever-laden atmosphere of a desert township stifles him.

"We're goin' west," a party said to the writer, as they shouldered their swags preparatory to leaving.

"But there is no water."

"We don't care. If the niggers can live, so can we."

They voiced the opinion of all the old pioneers, who soon after left for the Queensland "fields."

In striking contrast to the White Cliffs of the present are the Queensland centres. They are the real homes of the pioneers, and are likely, by reason of their inaccessible nature, to remain so. On these "fields" are met the daring spirits from all parts of the British Empire. The duke's son has for a mate a Queensland bullock-driver, and the man from Oxford wields his pick alongside a Canadian lumberman. The typical Australian bushman is also well represented, and the canny Scot and rollicking Irishman here form partnerships that only death can sever.

All the Queensland fields are very much alike, the country for hundreds of miles around being exactly the same—a level iron-shot sand-plain, with an occasional clump of shadeless gidgya- and mulga-trees. On approaching any township (!) the eye is

dazzled by the glistening white "dumps" surrounding the miners' shafts, and only after closer inspection does the camp appear to the wanderer's gaze. The settlement generally consists of three "bush shanties" and possibly half a dozen tents, upon which the sun beats down at a temperature of 150°. The population is always about one hundred and twenty, most of whom have nothing overhead at night but the brilliant Southern Cross—nor do they need more.

"If a man can't go hungry for a week," said an old prospector to the writer recently, "an' sleep where sundown finds him, he needn't go lookin' for opal."

"Why?"

"Cause he couldn't even git near the fields."

"How do you know when you are on a field?"

"Stranger, you is green. Why, when you sees the dumps you is on the fields!"

"Oh! And how can you tell one field from another?"

"That's easy. When you sees Corrugated Sam you is in Duck Creek, and when you meets Red-headed Scottie you knows you is on the Toompine fields."

He spoke truly, as I afterwards found out, each place being known to the miner by the name given to its most popular character.

Mining is carried on in the most primitive fashion, the prospector not being able to carry heavy tools in his travelling outfit. The first process after arriving on any field is pegging out a claim, a square of fifty feet being allowed each man. This is accomplished by inserting four mulga stumps at the corners, after doing which the shaft is started, its position in the

claim generally being determined, as most things are by miners in Queensland, by the side of a coin which comes down uppermost. The first three feet or so consists of soft drift-sand—the deposit of countless “willy-willies” or Australian desert tornadoes. Occasionally detached iron-stone boulders are met with in this, which are carefully examined for signs of opal matrix—a substance always associated with the gem, and supposed to be very immature opal. A hard conglomeration of iron-stone pebbles is next encountered, in which “colours”—little fiery specks of opal—are frequently found. This usually proves about four feet in thickness, after which an extremely hard, porous, and red formation is struck, which turns white on exposure to air. This latter substance—“vitrified mud,” the miners call it—extends downwards farther than any one has yet pierced, and in some of the iron leaders running through its vast body the miner hopes to find his long-looked-for “rise.”

The melancholy nature of their environments has had a strange effect upon the hardy pioneers of the desert. There is a grim unconscious humour attending all their dealings with their fellows, and to the stranger many of their actions are incomprehensible. Through long intercourse with desert solitude their brain has become slightly distorted, and it is indeed a study to see how some exaggerate trifles to grotesqueness, while with others the greatest good fortune or direst calamity excites no comment. There was one individual famous throughout the camp at Koroit as the “man who never struck anything.” He was so unlucky that no one would work with him as a mate, and day after day he picked away alone at the

bottom of his shaft with the dogged perseverance of the Anglo-Saxon in whatever clime. One day he did strike it, however—fully two hundred ounces of pin-fire orange, worth over twenty pounds per ounce.

“Boys, I reckon I’ll have a trip out to Brisbane now,” he remarked that evening, as the men assembled round Silent Ted’s camp-fire.

“You should make for Sydney too, Dave,” said Long Tom, blowing a cloud of eucalyptus smoke from his pipe. “There’s some good tucker-shops there.”

“I suppose I will, Tom. Any letters going out, boys? I goes at sunrise.”

This was all that was said, and next morning, after receiving the mails of the community, Dave started off for Eulo, where he hoped to find some conveyance bound for Cunnamulla, the nearest railway terminus.

Four weeks later the men were again sitting round Silent Ted’s fire (Ted was an excellent cook, hence his popularity), while Mac, the writer’s companion, who had a remarkably vivid imagination, regaled them with tales of adventure, weird and wonderful. He was detailing how, in the Klondike valley, he had thawed gold nuggets from the solid ice, when a stranger emerged from the clump of mulga-trees and crossed the fire-lit space towards the men.

“Night, boys,” he said, in the usual bush fashion.

“Night, stranger. Come far? Have some tucker,” answered Long Tom, making room for him round the fire.

“Oh, mates, an’ doesn’t ye not know me?” reproachfully said the stranger, as he attacked the piece of damper in professional style.

“Boys, it’s Unlucky Dave!” cried Long Tom. “An’ he ’as went an’ got shaved!”

"Snakes, Dave, but we would never have known ye. What luck?" chorused the men.

"Mates, Sydney is no camp for white men," said Dave. "'Trains an' 'lectric cars run all through it, an' it's full o' Jews. You've got to camp inside a hotel, too, an' you can't git no air, an' no one knows how to make damper."

"But what did you get for your opal?" queried Scottie.

"Oh, the stuff only fetched two pound an ounce."

"What!" yelled Mac. "It was worth twenty."

"You's got taken in, Dave," remarked Long Tom.

"I knows it, Tom; but I was too tired to argue with the Jew 'bout the price."

Nothing more was said on the subject, and, after making some strong and pointed observations anent some people's stupidity, Mac went on with his story.

Next day Dave went down his old shaft as usual, and, to the best of my knowledge, is working there still.

Shortly after Dave's return to Koroit the extreme scarcity of water forced most of the men to abandon the camp, and, in company with others, my party set out to prospect along the watershed of the Paroo. The entire band totalled twenty. My three companions and several others had bicycles, a few had camels, and some had horses, but most carried their own swag, or, in other words, walked. It was, indeed, a strange procession; but a more systematic or more determined prospecting party never blazed mulga. The men on foot kept the main channel of the waterless river, near the banks of which a scant vegetation formed food for the store-laden camels, while the cyclists and horsemen made wide

detours over the plains, joining the main body at night. Occasionally a water-hole was found, in which reptiles, crows, and many nameless creatures fought for what remained of the evil-smelling but precious fluid, and sometimes boulders carrying fiery streaks of opal were picked up from the sand. Coming to a fairly large water-hole one day, it was decided to camp there ; and soon two tents were pitched and some rough gidgya shades erected, after which the men tossed coins to determine their respective claims. Mac was first on his claim, and in less than half an hour his pick crashed through a large seam of opal.

"Ma fortune is made !" he cried excitedly, springing from his shaft. "Lor' ! there's tons o' it here."

"Lor' ! Scottie, is that all ye has struck ?" said a huge Victorian known as Melbourne Mike throughout the camp. "That stuff is only good for buildin' with when bricks get too dear."

"Ma man," roared Mac angrily, "I hae travelled as far as you, an' I can see wi' ma een shut that these bonny blue an' red stanes will gie me a' the fortune I want."

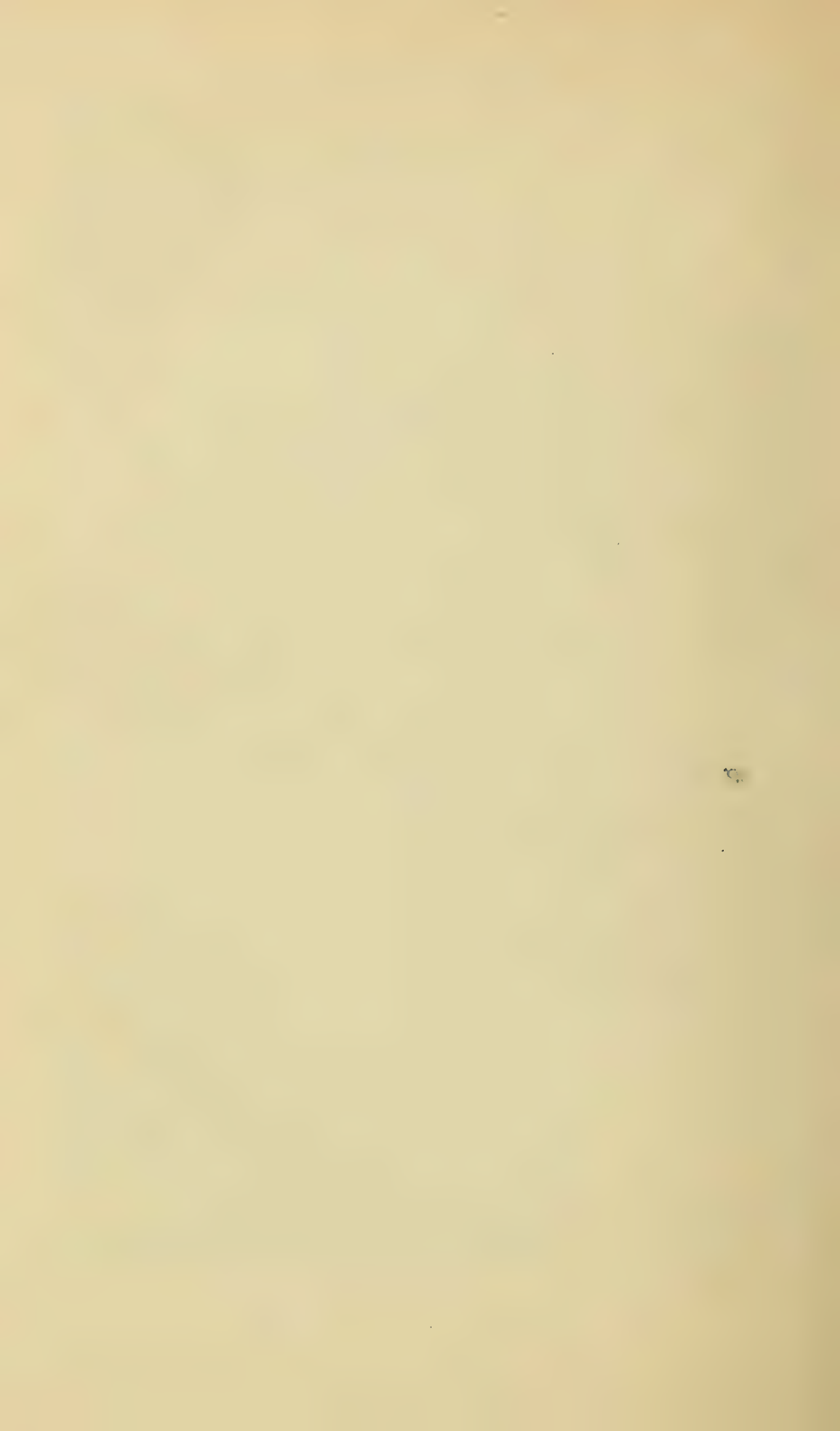
"Ha ! ha ! Scottie," laughed the men, the tears actually streaming down their unwashed faces.

"Why, man," cried Long Tom, "that's only potch, an' not worth nothin' ! See, Scottie, even Ted's laughin' at ye."

Mac's face lost its pleased expression ; one picturesque word he uttered, and then his pick rose and fell like a steam hammer, shattering the brilliantly coloured stones into fragments. Soon all the men struck the same seam, and as tons and tons of the glistening masses were thrown up, the air was filled with the true Australian bush poetry.



AN OPAL MINE



"Is this beautiful material really of no value?" lisped a young man whom the miners termed—not without reason—the "Prospecting Parson."

"Not in Australia, anyhow," answered Tom.

"But what is it?"

"Opal that Nature forgot to finish," said Tom.

"Come back an' get it a million years after this, Parson," roared an antiquated specimen of humanity known as "Satan," "an' you will be a dozen millionaires rolled into one."

"Hallo!" suddenly shouted Mac, who had been working with considerable energy. "Is this potch?"

He held in his hand a peculiarly-shaped stone: one end had been broken by his pick, and on the exposed surface red, blue, and green fire chased and mingled with each other in scintillating confusion.

"That is an opalized shell," exclaimed the Parson.

"Go on, Scottie, git more of them; that's as good as fifty sovereigns," cried Melbourne Mike encouragingly, and the others murmured their approval in characteristic fashion.

"But how did that shell come here?" enquired the Parson.

"Well, you is a rum parson," said Long Tom. "Doesn't ye know that we is standing in the bed of an old sea just now, an' where else should you find shells?"

"This is indeed strange," the Parson remarked to me; and before I could point out to him the many evidences for the truth of Tom's statement, old Satan broke in:

"Ye thinks it strange, Parson," he croaked. "Well, it ain't nothing to what I've seen in this God-forgotten country, an' if you hunts up old Nulla

Dulla's tribe away north in the Gulf country, an' see them go through their big corroboree with their ghinghi (devil) and bunyips (immortal monsters), you will find out more things in five minutes—if ye lives—than ye could dream of between now and the last 'peg out.' ”

The Parson seemed interested, but Satan would not say more; words are generally superfluous in Queensland. I had still a most vivid recollection of Nulla Dulla's corroboree, however, being one of perhaps the only two white men who ever witnessed that ceremony, and I hastened to advise the Parson to pry not into the secrets of the aborigines.

A shout from Silent Ted interrupted our conversation, and knowing that something extraordinary must have occurred before Ted would speak, all rushed over to him.

“I has struck it, mates,” he cried, wiping the sweat from his brow, “an' I has——” Here a tired look came into his eyes, his jaws clicked together, and his sentence remained unfinished.

“You has done it this time,” said Tom to Ted. “What seam did it come from? Speak, man.”

Ted pointed to his shaft, but said nothing; and with a muttered exclamation Melbourne Mike seized the mass of matrix from his hand and jumped into the hole.

“My oath, mates!” he cried, fitting the piece to the edge of an outjutting ledge, “it's just underlying the potch seam.”

The men waited to hear no more, but stampeded to their own shafts, and in a few seconds sundry sounds that rose high above the crash of the pick denoted that they too had struck it. The gem opal

seam lay three inches underneath the potch strata, and evidently was of great extent. Before sundown each man had unearthed several ounces, and I found another opalized shell. The place was named Mac's Camp, and for some days all went well; but the demands made on the water-hole for men and animals at length proved too much for its endurance, and one morning but a writhing mass of mud remained. The results had been satisfactory to all, however, with the exception of the Parson, who had devoted his time to selecting the best pieces of the hated potch, and when the abandonment of the camp became inevitable, most of the men resolved to have a "spell" at the coast. My party did not join them, but, taking advantage of our means of locomotion, set out for the Toompine fields, where Mac duly met and fraternized with his red-headed countryman, who had first discovered opal there while chasing a kangaroo.

The miners at Toompine were very much disheartened, having struck nothing but potch for a month past; and as water had to be carted from a native well twenty miles distant, matters were almost at a standstill.

"I dinna ken whaur the opal has gone to," the discoverer of the fields said to me, "but it's no here, onyway."

While camped here news was brought of some "big finds" on the Warrego River, and after a week spent at Toompine with indifferent results, we started off for the new district. When near the river two cycle tracks were crossed, the peculiar impression of which was strangely familiar. Altering our course, we followed the tracks, and ultimately located two of the original Koroit men prospecting for turquoises

and sapphires in a creek tributary to the Warrego River. Turquoises, sapphires, and garnets are very common in that part of Queensland ; but their value is dwarfed into insignificance because of their proximity to the opal district.

We spent some time with Charlie the Poet and Kangaroo George, as the men were called, and many of the above-named gems were found ; but the heat becoming more intense as the summer advanced, we eventually left the Warrego also, and made for the south. *En route* we traversed the Emerald country of Central Queensland, and finally crossed the Barwon or Darling River into New South Wales.

At Goondiwindi, on the Macintyre River, we overtook our old friend Silent Ted. He was one of the early pioneers of the diamond-fields, he informed us, and was going back to have a look at the "old show."

"Where did you leave the rest of the boys?" I enquired.

"Brisbane."

"Did the Parson stay there?"

Ted shook his head.

"Where did he go?"

"Him an' Satan struck for Inverell. Parson's dead broke."

"Inverell!" said Mac. "That's whaur the diamonds come frae, is it no?"

Ted did not answer ; and, looking up, I saw by the thoughtful expression on his face that the limit of his vocal powers had been reached.

The news that the Parson was in Inverell at once made me determine to visit the place, and, leaving all our heavy equipments to follow with Ted and his two pack-horses, we set out again, and in four days

reached the famous diamond-fields of New South Wales. I found the Parson in about ten minutes: he was acting as editor of a local paper, and, in his own words, "it was booming." He still had his potch, the box containing that material and a roughly-constructed table being the only furniture in his little galvanized-iron apartment.

The resources of the district around Inverell are really remarkable. Diamonds and other stones of value are found in the creeks, notably in those which feed the Gwyder River, near which the town stands. Recently tin has been discovered at the deeper levels, and since then some of the miners, assisted by Sydney capitalists, have imported improved machinery, one strange result being that diamonds and tin are now mined from the same shaft. Fortunes are not the rule here, but some lucky "finds" have been made, and the general average is better than on many more famous fields.

Our party, reinforced by Silent Ted and the Parson, whom we persuaded to resign his appointment, prospected several of the neighbouring gullies, and found in all eight different species of gems. Gold was also found in almost every water channel, but we preferred to leave that metal to those who were specially equipped for its somewhat laborious treatment, and after spending another month in the New England district we returned to Sydney.

Our time had not been so profitably employed among the creeks of the Blue Mountains as when out on the opal-fields, but life had been pleasant. The air on those mountains is clear and exhilarating, water is plentiful, and game is abundant.

Another richly endowed district is Moss Vale, only

sixty miles on direct railway line south of Sydney. I have not visited this place, being of opinion, like all prospectors, that it is too convenient for every one to give them much chance. Nevertheless, it is reported that almost every known gem had been found there, and that, despite its nearness to the capital and the favoured condition of the country, it is almost ignored.

Emeralds are found in Central Queensland and in various parts of New South Wales, but prospecting for them is much of the nature of a lottery, and is only tried as a change from another work.

In the Macdonald Mountains of South Australia rubies are found in great profusion ; but the difficulties attending the transportation of stores out to those isolated iron mounds render prospecting, unless in well-equipped expeditions, next to impossible.

All Western Queensland is rich in opal of some grade, and it is supposed that farther out on the great desert even more exists. Many a strange tale is told round the camp fire of that great lone land beyond the Cooper, a black sulphury expanse, over the surface of which the dreaded "willy-willy" is ever in fierce gyration. And yet the prospectors say, and I can bear them out in part, that "the land of the ghinghi is ablaze with blood-flashing opal."

The miners have a superstitious dread of the ubiquitous potch, and will often leave a field if the potch be too plentiful. Potch is simply opal without the living fire, or, as the miners say, "opal a million years too young." It is of all colours, often in the same seam, and has been found in sheets up to three inches in thickness. Occasionally a vertical iron-stone bar may intercept the potch seam, in which case

the potch dips, and generally "makes" into first-class or gem opal at a deeper level. The best opal is invariably found between two parallel bars of iron-stone, but beyond the fact that the existence of the siliceous gem is largely due to enormous compression, and that the gem is usually more exquisitely coloured when taken from hard country, nothing is actually known as to its origin.

Unfortunately for the prospector, gems in the rough, unlike gold, have no fixed value, and consequently the miners are at the mercy of the German and Jew buyers when disposing of their wares. A story is current among the miners at Eromanga which illustrates the method of dealing adopted by the travelling buyers. Two men found a large piece of "pin-fire," or the best opal, and as one was leaving the country then the stone was broken in two, each partner keeping a piece. The man who stayed sold his half to the first buyer that came along. He got two sovereigns for it after the usual haggling, the buyer telling him that it was simply charity giving more than half-a-crown for the piece. A few months later a letter was received from the man who had gone home, informing his late partner that he had disposed of his half in Hamburg for thirty pounds per ounce (it weighed two and a half ounces), and asking him to send on the other half for like disposal. Comment is unnecessary, but that state of affairs is common.

Travelling in the great interior is attended with many difficulties owing to the absence of water. Horses, and even camels, are almost useless; but the bicycle has proved of much service, and with its aid and the guidance of the Southern Cross, the bushman

will fearlessly navigate that immense sea of iron-shot sand that constitutes the far back-blocks.

The Australian interior is still the land of the pioneer. The enervating influence of their dreary surroundings makes men like little children in some things, but they are absolutely fearless, and true as steel to their comrades. Only the daring, however, need go to that grim land where the opal bursts through its iron cap and shines in streaks of iridescent splendour from almost every outcropping boulder. Life there is not a pleasant dream; the dingo's dismal howl makes the blood run cold, the mopoke's melancholy wail and the crow's fiendish croak irritate beyond endurance, while pests innumerable make night an inferno.

The Parson (who is well known in England) has since disposed of his potch in Hamburg. He had over 100 lb. of the material, and obtained five shillings an ounce for it.

A Sugar Expert

THE cultivation of the sugar-cane has long been associated with British colonial enterprise. The industry has had many ups and downs, and at times has even threatened to die out altogether, so seriously have adverse circumstances so often indirectly affected it. But those periods of depression passed, a change of air—and perhaps soil—being all that was required to bring about the recovery, and the sun setting on the glory of the West Indian plantations, heralded dawn far across the murmuring Pacific on the fertile seaboard of our youngest colony. Thus the industry, so far as British pioneers were concerned, was transferred from the north side of the equator to the south, and in sunny Queensland and the ever-smiling Fiji Islands now has its home.

My knowledge of sugar consisted of a vague impression that the cheaper beet product of Europe had forced the West Indian cane-sugar from the British market, and in common with most Britons I became very indignant when the thought occurred. I was seldom troubled about the matter, however, and as I sat in the smoke-room of the s.s. *Gabo* while she leisurely ploughed the phosphorescent waters off Hinchinbrook Island light, *en route* from Cooktown

and Cairns to Townsville and the south, certainly nothing was further from my mind than sugar.

Besides myself, there were eight men in the stuffy little "hen-coop," as one of them termed the apartment: four were lying on their backs on the forms either sleeping or engaged in profound meditation; two very serious-visaged, copper-skinned individuals in evening dress were playing a mysterious sort of game in which a pack of cards, a piece of perforated wood, some broken matches for inserting in the holes, and a few bottles of some liquid substance were the most prominent features. Of the other two, one was an elderly, pleasant-faced gentleman in shirt sleeves; he had a Queensland railway time-table open on the marble standard before him, and as he was working out some intricate problem on the fly-leaf of a volume borrowed from the ship's limited library, I suspected he was calculating when a certain train would arrive at its destination. The eighth man was sitting near me: in appearance he resembled the arithmetician, the only difference being that he had a full grey moustache, while his painstaking friend was bearded. There were deep-set lines of worry across his forehead and underneath his eyes, and even allowing for the softening effect that perspiration has upon spotless shirt-fronts, he seemed unsuited to the style of dress modern society enforces upon its victims for evening wear. His feet were resting on a side table, a half-empty bottle and a glass lying on either side of them, and while his eyes were staring through an open port-hole into the darkness beyond, he filled the little saloon with dense clouds of smoke from a most odoriferous cigar. I divided my attention between counting the revolutions of the ship's propeller and

speculating on the professions of my companions; but noting that the two serious men working with the cards and matches always filled their respective glasses when their matches reached a certain point on the perforated board, I became engrossed in their wonderful game and forgot everything else.

"How is trade?" suddenly spoke a voice beside me, and, looking up quickly, I saw the gentleman with the cigar regarding me intently.

"As usual," I made answer, wondering what trade he referred to.

He nodded significantly towards his bottle and an empty glass which the steward had just brought in, and then continued: "In a hurry?"

"No."

"Then I would like to get your opinion on my place. I don't mind the expense."

"My opinion on what?"

"Oh, sugar, of course!"

"But I know nothing about sugar," I said, with some surprise.

"Oh, that's all right! I'm squatted down on the Burdekin now, you know, and I reckon I've cane that goes fifteen ton to the acre."

"I am very glad to hear of your good fortune."

"Then you'll come? We take the tram at Townsville and go sixty miles down country to Ayr. My plantation is right on the river, and I've about twenty farmers on it, not to speak of the show I run myself with white workers and niggers."

The two card-players now stopped to listen to the conversation, the gentleman with the time-table also looked up interestedly, and two of the reclining men raised themselves to a sitting posture.

"We'll share in any ex's," cried one of the latter ;
"only say you'll come and see our patches."

"What good would that do?" I enquired.

"Why, you could give an expert's opinion——"

"See here, Mr Wedderburn," interrupted my first friend, "I'm running this mill. Now," he continued, turning to me, "name your price, and I'll write you a cheque straight away."

"I have already said that I know nothing whatever about sugar," I reminded him.

"Well, an expert doesn't need to know anything."

"But I am not an expert."

"Oh, come now!" chorused the men. "The skipper told us at Cairns that you had just written a report for some new fields up north, and we saw you writing this afternoon ourselves."

"But I was not writing about sugar," I ventured mildly.

"Let me explain," cried the pleasant-faced man, rising and coming forward. "We believe we have about the best part of Queensland under sugar down on the Burdekin delta, and we thought if we could get you along to report on it, it might do a lot of good."

"Then it is really an article in one of the Sydney or Melbourne dailies you wish?"

"Well, in a kind of way, yes. We are ahead of Mackay now, and we don't see why the country shouldn't know it. You will come?"

"I would," I replied, "only I must be in Sydney before Saturday week, and there is no boat after the *Gabo* which will land me by that time."

"Is that all?" laughed the men; and one added, "I'll carry you to Brisbane before the *Gabo* gets in."

"We can cart you over to Wangaratta," said my

time-table friend. "From there you can train to Bowen, where you will catch the H. S. & Company's sugar-boat for Mackay, and from there the *Barcoo* will land you at Gladstone to connect with the Bundaberg and Brisbane mail. You will arrive in Brisbane at 5.30 in the morning, and after breakfast you can leave with the Sydney train, getting into Redfern station some days ahead of the *Gabo*, even though she bursts her boilers to beat her usual time." The speaker paused to pass a large handkerchief across his perspiring face, and, filled with admiration for the man who could so deftly unravel the intricate questions attending fifteen hundred miles of travelling in Queensland, I consented to accompany the sugar-planters down to their homes. "But remember all responsibility rests with you," I said; to which they answered, "Responsibility be hanged! there ain't any."

This point settled, I was invited to participate in liquid refreshments, and afterwards favoured with a general history of the sugar industry, from which I gathered that the question of Kanaka or South Sea Island labour greatly interfered with the sentiment of a White Australia. Before we turned in I was fully conversant with the details of cane cultivation; knew that Tom Hardy, my first acquaintance, had been a Kanaka raider in his time, and was now one of the wealthiest planters and mill-owners in Northern Queensland; that the men had been at a planters' conference in Cairns, where new ground was being laid out; that they were all British to the backbone, and drank their whisky neat.

Next morning we were inside the Townsville break-water, and after breakfast all the passengers went

ashore, any going farther south preferring the more commodious saloons of the town as a place of abode while the *Gabo* was loading to the steamer's own bar.

Townsville is the chief city of Northern Queensland, but the people of Charters Towers deny that fact. It consists of Flinders Street, Castle Hill, Melton Hill, a breakwater about a mile and a half in length, and a swing-bridge over Ross Creek, on the banks of which water the best part of the town is built. There are about twenty hotels, twelve banks, ten churches, and many other public buildings, the most important being the post-office. It owes its origin to the sugar country, in the midst of which it may be said to stand; but it is also a great meat export centre, and recently the extensive development of the Charters Towers gold-fields, about eighty miles westward by rail, has caused it to spring into a prominence which its nineteen thousand inhabitants say they "always reckoned it would." Townsville is a hot town, a busy town, and a cosmopolitan town, but the populace seem greatly afflicted with the "great Australian thirst" complaint.

"Well, boys," said Winter, one of the card-players of the previous evening, as we entered the town, "the first thing is breakfast. Come over to Tattersall's——"

"Hold hard, Winter," cried Hardy, "we had breakfast in the old tub not ten minutes ago."

"You had, maybe, but I guess Howard Smith and Company's steward department didn't lose much with some of the boys."

"Surely no one felt sick while sailing inside the Barrier Reef!" I exclaimed.

"My lad, that's how I made my fortune," said Hardy, as we entered the hotel. "I always landed my niggers (Kanaka labourers) on a creek with a bad bar, and when the Gov. officer was inclined to say things, I—well—I just couldn't come inshore, and he had to come out. Once I got him on board I filled him with the usual, and the motion of the boat and smell of the Polynesians did the rest. He was mighty glad to sign me clear before he got ashore again, I can tell you."

"And if he didn't?" queried Winter.

"Well, I couldn't help a storm rising, could I? And if we were blown out on to the Great Barrier, whose fault was it?" Hardy's voice rose as he spoke, as if challenging some one to question the grievances of a "labour runner," and, fearing that he had taken offence at something implied in Winter's words, I innocently ventured, "I am sure it could not be yours." This remark seemed to amuse all vastly, for they laughed to such an extent that the hotel proprietor rushed in from an adjoining room to see who had mistaken kerosene for whisky.

The appearance of breakfast put an end to the merriment, and after this undeserved insult to the *Gabo's* table was over the party split up to "attend to business," as each man said. But that was extremely doubtful. I accompanied Hardy out to Stewart's Creek boiling-works, where he had a call to make, and an hour later we found ourselves on board the train or "tram" bound for the plantations sixty miles distant. Our conveyance was somewhat remarkable in several respects, but, as Hardy said, it was "wonderfully convenient"; and travelling along at a rate of fifteen miles an hour, with the

cooling breeze caused by the motion blowing through the open sides of our carriage, I also thought that it was a very pleasant mode of locomotion. Our route lay through dense eucalypti forests, then cleared scrub lands and rolling downs, through which numerous creeks and gullies flowed—when there was water in them. Every five or six miles a station or siding for the surrounding settlements would be reached, and after the passengers and officials had chatted pleasantly for a few minutes, the driver would mount his odd little engine and awake the plains for miles around with a whistle that might have served an Atlantic liner, and start off again.

At length we entered the domain of the sugar kings, and I saw for the first time the majestic cane in all its splendour. The railway ran straight through the heart of the fields, and, being “first - class” passengers, we therefore had the privilege of the guard’s company and conversation. This gentleman was very obliging, and, on my request, at once stopped the train to allow me to obtain a piece of ripe cane for closer inspection. In appearance a sugar-cane patch resembles a growing wheat-field, only everything is magnified many times. On examining my single stem, which before it was cut was about ten feet in height, I thought it not unlike a dwarf palm: the leaves were about fifteen inches in length and two and a half in breadth at the middle, from which point they tapered down to extreme fineness.

“That’s a bit of all right,” said the guard, cutting off a piece of the stem and putting it in his mouth. “Try it.” I cut another piece and did so, and at once agreed with him.



[By permission of the Queensland Government]

We were now running on a stretch of line upon which there were no sidings for ten miles, and the long, unbroken walls of cane that flanked the narrow railway shut off everything else from view. "We might as well be in a tunnel, and, in any case, I could run as fast as we are travelling," I said shortly to the guard, who, from the foot-board outside, was beginning to descant on the beauties of the scenery and the high speed we were now developing.

"Lor'! an' can't ye see the sky up there? What more does ye want? There's Lochinvar siding, too, ten miles ahead; and as for runnin' as fast, git off an'—— Lor'! what's wrong now?" The acrobatic official jumped from the car, and Hardy and I and some other passengers looked out. The train had stopped, and the driver was carrying on a conversation with some one in front, who had evidently signalled the train to draw up.

"Here, darn ye, what does ye mean?" cried the guard, rushing along the rails. "Get aboard quick if ye are goin'."

"But I am not going, whiskers," answered he who had stopped the train. "I only wanted some hot water for my billy, and I've got it now from the engine. Ye'll better hurry up or ye'll be late. Thanks, Bob (to the driver), for the water!" The train steamed away again, and in due course arrived at Ayr.

Ayr is a unique little township situated on the delta of the Burdekin River. It is the centre of the northern sugar industry, and exists chiefly to supply the wants of the mill-owners, farmers, and growers around, and as a convenient place in which the plantation workers—white and black—may spend their money. There

are only five Government buildings in the township, three of which are popularly known as the "preventative, corrective, and reflective" establishments. When it is said that the last-named is well patronized during holiday seasons and frequently on Saturday afternoons has standing room only, a good idea of the nature of the previously-mentioned workers will be obtained. The post-office and school are the remaining state erections, but two hotels, and a church, which is used by Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Salvation Army, and several other bodies in turn, are also worthy of mention.

Hardy had wired from Townsville that we were coming, consequently we were met at the station and driven to his bungalow, which was some miles out, in his buggy. On the way I counted about a score of planters' mansions and several factories or crushing-mills, while on every hand Kanakas, Chinese, and white men were cutting down the giant cane in a fashion which suggested that humanity had a long lease of life in those parts.

"That's right, don't hurry; there's plenty of time between now and Christmas," yelled Hardy sarcastically, as we came near a group of white men working very leisurely. Strangely enough, his words had quite an opposite effect to the advice contained in them, and the cane began to fall as if a tornado had struck it.

"That's my home patch," my friend informed me as we drove past. "Most of my land is given out to farmers and small growers, who contract to supply me with cane at ten shillings a ton; but I keep these fellows going here myself—well—if it isn't for charity I don't know what it's for, for they certainly do not work for their seven and six a day. Darn the whole

lot! The Government shouts about a white Australia, too; it's enough to make a man go into coffee or bananas."

I sympathized with the old gentleman to the best of my ability, and shortly afterwards we arrived at his house, a handsome structure almost covered with brilliant creepers, in the midst of an orange grove. He introduced me to his wife and daughter and the latter's governess or companion as an expert, and, knowing that any attempt at explanation on my part would not be rightly understood, I allowed his statement to pass without comment. After refreshments had been served we walked over to the mill to look round and have a talk with Mr Wilton, the manager, who, Mr Hardy informed me, was the "best sugar man in Queensland or any other country." This information, as may be imagined, was very disconcerting to me; but having had previous experience of the fact that silence often passes for wisdom, I resolved not to confess my ignorance to the manager, at least not until forced to do so.

Filled with this truly Australian idea of "bluffing," I followed Mr Hardy into the manager's room, and at once modified my resolutions, for that gentleman and I had met before. We exchanged kindly enquiries, and then all set out on a tour round the mill, Mr Wilton explaining that the process of extraction they adopted was known as "triple maceration." I did not altogether understand what that was, but said nothing, and confined my attention to some cane passing between the heavy iron rollers.

"How much juice do you get per ton, Mr Wilton?" I enquired.

"I—I—oh, that is some experimental stuff going

through just now ; we are not yet sure what it will give."

"How do you neutralize the acid in the juice after extraction?" I asked.

"With lime chiefly, and after that process is over we send the clarified juice to be boiled down. When it cools it crystallizes, and the result is raw sugar ; the residue which does not crystallize, of course, as you know, is called molasses, and this is usually distilled into rum."

"Yes ; I remember reading something like that in a school text-book," I remarked. "I suppose the new tariff operates against the successful production of rum as a by-product?"

"Now you're into it, I'll leave you to talk scientific a bit," cried Hardy delightedly. "I knew it was an expert I needed." The kind-hearted planter turned away, and the manager and I surveyed each other critically.

"Well?" he said enquiringly.

"Well?" I repeated, with a similar note of interrogation.

"I never expected to see you here."

"I never expected to be here myself."

"Isn't it strange that we both should be connected with sugar?"

"Yes ; when I knew you last you were purser on board the old barge *K*——, trading between Sydney and Westralian ports."

"That's so ; and you were then a half-stranded sand-groper."

"Well?" I said.

"Well?"

"What do you know about sugar?"

"Nothing ; and you ?"

"Ditto."

"Then we are both frauds ?"

"Oh, no ! I'm only a sugar expert, and, as Mr Hardy will tell you, an expert is not supposed to know anything ; but you are mill manager ; I don't quite see how you get along on the same principles."

"Oh, that's easy, the mill manages itself ; and being fairly well used to figures, I prevent the old man from being cheated by the people down south. But what are you here for ? It seems to me I've got all the qualifications of an expert myself."

"We'll waive that question in the meantime," I suggested. "The mill is closing now, and Mr Hardy is waiting for us." Mr Wilton had no objections, and, joining the old planter, we returned to the house, and shortly after sat down to dinner.

Mrs Hardy was a kindly Scotch lady, and her daughter a beautiful combination of Sydney culture, bush simplicity, and Scotch practicalness, and during the meal this latter part of her nature proved very embarrassing to me in my character of expert. I usually managed, however, to divert attention from my ignorance by involving Wilton in any technical questions she wished answered, and he, promptly and unblushingly, changed the subject.

"It is a pity for you young fellows that this world is so tame now," remarked Mr Hardy, towards the termination of the banquet.

"How so ?" I enquired.

"Because there is no chance of making any shekels out of anything but trade now, and I for one would never have stood that when I was young."

"You were a Kanaka importer originally, I believe?" said Wilton.

"Yes; I've landed a good few thousand Polynesians in Queensland in my time, but the beggars got to know too much at last, and would not sign on for less than half-a-crown a day and free passage home again at the end of three years."

"But did it matter what they wanted? I thought you raided them and took what you required without asking permission?" continued the manager.

"I did no more than the missionaries did, my boy, and I always kept my word to the niggers at least. Lor'! when I remember old Roderick Dhu and his schooner *Heather Bell*!"

"What did he do?" asked Wilton; and I looked curiously at the picture of a stalwart Highlander in war-like attitude on the label of a bottle which stood on the table.

"He ran the missionary craft to the islands crammed up with Bibles and old clothes, and—well—I'm a decent-living heathen myself now, so I am not going to say what was done with the stuff, but, anyhow, the *Heather Bell* always beached down on Wallace Creek when she came back, and a cargo of powerful-smelling niggers that never paid duty came out of her holds. No; that thing on the bottle ain't Roderick's figure-head at all. He was a little man, but, Lord! he was a terror, and as square a man to his mates as ever lived. I hear he's a missionary himself now. But there's no use filling up your heads with that sort of talk. We'll soon not be able to get a nigger into Australia without painting him white first. Spank up the piano, Mabel, and make things lively." Wilton and I manœuvred the instrument out to the

veranda, and, sitting there in the delightful coolness of early tropical night, almost intoxicated with the exquisite blend of perfume from the citrus-trees and the aroma of the coffee-shrubs, I listened to the almost forgotten airs of the homeland, until Hardy cast his cigar from him in disgust and lit a pipe of "death to the mosquito" tobacco. That mixture was well named ; it would kill more than mosquitoes, and it at once broke the enchanting spell that had fallen over me and chased the ladies inside. After that we sat far into the night talking on many subjects, but never once mentioning sugar.

I was awakened the following morning by the shrill sounds of the mill's whistle, and, going out to the cane-fields at once, I witnessed the starting of the day's work. In this part there were about a dozen Kanakas and two white overseers, who, as they themselves informed me, had only landed in Australia from the old country a month previously. The Kanakas seemed a very intelligent set of people, but looked ill at ease in the garments indispensable to their white brethren. One, named King Billium, was just giving his views in picturesque language on the Chinese workers elsewhere employed when an engine hauling a truck steamed alongside on the portable railway for a load of cane to take to the mill.

"Load up there, you black heathens!" cried the driver, accompanying his words with some forcible ejaculations that were quite unnecessary.

"You go hang!" answered King Billium shortly ; but nevertheless the wagon was speedily filled with the cut cane. The driver meanwhile had been fumbling about the mechanism of the engine, but, seeing that all was ready, he now essayed to start.

Nothing moved, however, and King Billium and his comrades laughed.

"D——! It's gone cronk!" roared the exasperated driver, tugging violently at a lever; and as he spoke a cloud of hissing steam burst from underneath the boiler and enveloped the locomotive completely.

The two white overseers now came forward and enquired what was wrong, and, while a somewhat heated debate was in progress between them and the driver anent the frequency of breakdowns, Mr Hardy arrived on the scene.

"What is it now, Saunders?" he asked irritably.

"At least a bob a day, Boss; the other plantation drivers don't do the work I do," replied the driver.

"Will you men stand by and see me swindled by this miserable specimen?" cried Hardy, addressing some other white men who had been attracted to the spot by the noise.

"If a man touches that engine who is not in the Union, I'll get him hunted outen Ostralya," cried Saunders threateningly.

"Joinering is my line," said one of the men.

"Engineering is not mine," muttered another.

"I think I can fix matters," I said, emerging from the cloud of steam in which I had been investigating.

"You'll better not touch it," roared the driver.

"I've the Union behind me."

"You'd have Queensland behind you too if I could get another man," cried Hardy wrathfully.

"I don't think your Union will interfere in this case," I said. "I am an engineer myself, you know, and if you don't get up at once and shut off that exhaust, I'll do it, and after your dismissal perhaps you will find the Union very unsympathetic."

"I cave, Boss," cried the driver, jumping into the cab and stopping the escaping steam ; "but it ain't fair for engineers to be goin' about this plantation togged up as experts." While speaking he started the engine, and went off at a reckless pace down the line.

"Lor' ! was that all that was wrong with the pug ?" said Hardy, as we walked in for breakfast. "That's the third time the same thing has happened this week, and each time the driver had to get a rise in his wages over it."

"But you have experienced engineers in the mill ; surely they would not allow such a trick to be played too often ?"

"Perhaps not ; but, you see, this country is rotten with unions, and no man will interfere with another man's work. We master planters all know that, so I have always squared the beggar rather than ask them. I did not know, however, that he was just blowing off the exhaust, or I might have got the better of him some other way."

I recognized that even sugar-planters had their troubles, but marvelled greatly at their nature. After breakfast we drove over to inspect the fields of Mr Hardy's largest dependent farmer, and on our arrival at his place my friend left me to attend to some business in the township of Ayr, and Mr Cooper, the farmer in question, took me in hand.

"I have a fair crop," he confided, as we watched the Kanaka cutters at work. "I hardly expect the mills can get through my stuff before Christmas."

"Are all your men Kanakas ?" I enquired.

"No ; I've two hundred acres with a couple of Irishmen on their own. I buy all their cane at ten

shillings a ton, and Hardy buys all mine at contract price of twelve and sixpence."

"How much cane can you raise per acre?"

"Anything from a ton and a half to fifteen tons on new ground. But come and see my arrow-root patch; it's the best in Queensland."

I followed him through some scrub-land until we came to what I first thought was a turnip-field, but on closer examination I saw that the fruit grew on top. My friend paused, and indicated the field with a wave of his hand.

"What do you think of that?" he said.

I shook my head. The fruit was strangely familiar, but I had been in the belief that arrow-root really was a root.

"I should say that those were pine-apples," I ventured, "only——" I stopped, for Cooper was looking at me strangely.

"They are pine-apples," he said, "and first-class ones too. Have you ever seen better?"

"No," I replied, slowly and truthfully. I had never seen pine-apples growing before, and hitherto had imagined that they flourished under very different circumstances. "Do you find a ready market for these?" I enquired, as we resumed our walk.

"Yes; Brisbane takes ship-loads of them. They pay well, too, for they keep on growing after the first year without any trouble. But see, what do you think of that stuff?"

"Why, that's tobacco!" I cried, recognizing the flowering plant from a distance.

"Of course! and you'll find it's equal to any grown elsewhere, too. But here's my domicile; come over and see my coffee before we go any farther. Yes,



[By permission of the Queensland Government]

PINE-APPLE PLANTATION, QUEENSLAND

those are bananas down there. I tried a few bread-fruit trees once over in that corner, but I think Mrs Cooper didn't care about them, for they never came to much."

"You seem to grow a fair selection of everything," I remarked, wondering how he found time for sugar-planting, his legitimate occupation.

"Yes ; but you haven't seen the half of my crops yet. You see, the land belongs to Hardy, and I only contract to give him my cane."

"Does he not object to your trying all sorts of experiments on his land?"

"No ; why should he? He jumped this land himself when he first pitched here. Oh, I know all about that ! but—I'm forgetting again. H. is the whitest man living ; but Mrs Cooper is always nagging about me being under him."

"You don't appear to suffer much from his restraint."

"No ; and fact is, I don't, but when we came out from the old country ten years ago, Bob Deverell and I were Hardy's overseers until he started us for ourselves, and now my wife thinks that we—not Deverell, of course — being English, and making money fast, are as good as he is. I don't think that, but she rules the roost here. Get behind this banana clump—I hear her."

"John," called a voice from the house at this moment, "don't let the gentleman go over to that madman's before lunch."

"You hear her?" grinned John.

"Yes. Who is the madman?"

"Deverell ; she's dead nuts on him and his people. But come along, we've just time to see my vine-

yard—the only one in the place—and get over for lunch.”

“Over where?”

“To Deverell’s. He and I are in the same boat, for his wife hates mine.”

“Oh! but won’t you get into trouble afterwards with Mrs Cooper?”

“I suppose so; but it’s not every day an expert comes along, so I can’t help that.” Mr Cooper relapsed into deep meditation and strode off at a lively rate, and, expecting every moment to find a virago brandishing some household furniture about our heads, I kept pace with him. My guide was now in a reflective mood, but that did not prevent him from pouring forth a string of expletives at some “niggers” as we passed down the cutting-line. They did not mind in the slightest, however, and threw down their tools whenever we were out of sight. After a tour around my friend’s plantations of coffee, tobacco, etc., and receiving a brief outline of his plans for next season, in which sugar was never mentioned, we arrived at Deverell’s homestead, and found that individual sitting on a fence watching the movements of a crow tied by one leg to a long string, to the other end of which was attached a spring-balance.

“I is darned worried,” he said, in the true vernacular, after I had been introduced.

“I am very sorry,” I said sympathizingly. “Are your crops going wrong?”

“No, they’re not too bad; but I’ve just finished a patent flying-machine, all painted up nicely and everything, an’ the darned thing won’t fly.”

I looked at the speaker in amazement, but, recollect-

ing I was in Queensland, and in the tropics at that, I said :

“Oh, you’ll soon remedy that trifling detail ! but I have been sent to have a look at your sugar-cane——”

“Hang sugar ! Come and have a swim.”

“Get out, Bob, it’s an expert you have got this time,” said Cooper in alarm. “You’d better be careful what you say.”

I was now interested in Deverell, however, for on every hand were evidences that he was a man of parts, and, looking over at a complicated arrangement of cranks and pinion-wheels, from the midst of which a series of long horizontal cutting-discs projected, I enquired if that were his flying-machine.

“No ; that’s my patent cutter,” he answered. “I believe in a white Australia, an’ that’s the thing that’s goin’ to bring it about. I haven’t tried it yet ’cause I can’t get power enough to drive it.”

“I think it a very ingenious contrivance,” I said. “But what are you doing with that crow ? ”

“Findin’ out how much power it has, an’ how it can fly when my affair can’t. See ! it’s went an’ pulled eight pounds that time.” He stooped as he spoke and lifted the spring-balance to which the crow was tethered. “I’m done !” he exclaimed dismally. “If that darned thing can pull over three times its weight, that’s how it flies ; an’ no man need hope to fly with wings, anyhow, for he can’t pull more than twice his weight.” At this point the crow snapped the cord that held it and flew away with an evil croak.

“The bird’s laughing at you, Bob,” said Cooper. “It’s evidently got more power in its flappers than you thought.”

The inventor sighed, and, feeling sorry for him, I suggested that a steam-engine or an oil motor might prove of service to him in his experiments; but he refused to be comforted.

"I'll go an' invent a something that doesn't need nothin' to work it," he said finally. "I made a pile once outen some tea I growed by ticklin' the roots with ——" I never heard what he tickled the roots with, for his words were cut short by a shower of water which, falling over and around us, drenched us to the skin.

"That's my sprinkler; ain't it a daisy?" yelled Deverell delightedly. "Cooper must have stepped on the connecting spring." I did not say anything; but as Cooper had innocently moved from his first position, I could quite believe that he was the cause of our drenching. The day was very hot, and although inconvenient, it was very refreshing to feel the cool water in such close proximity.

"That reminds me," continued Deverell, "come along for the swim"; and without waiting for further particulars I followed him, Cooper also coming after he had found the disconnecting tap of the sprinkler. We soon reached a clump of palms, around the outside of which grew a screen of wild vine creepers. I could not understand how such luxuriant vegetation flourished there, for the country in the immediate vicinity was particularly barren and sandy, but, pushing through the scrub, I was at once enlightened. A lagoon of crystal water lay in the heart of the timber, and in the centre a large fountain was playing beautifully.

"This is my bathroom," said Deverell, jumping in, and my clothes being already wet, and the water

the first I had seen in such quantity in that part of the world, I lost no time in joining him, Cooper following suit next minute. "This is the Burdekin water," explained Deverell, standing in the middle of the pool, which was four feet in depth. "I tapped it myself, and from the bore there pipes lead for miles all over the plantations."

"Does it never run dry?" I asked.

"No; and it can't either, unless the Burdekin stops flowing. The level is only twelve feet down, and as fast as the big pump over at the mill draws it up into the supply-pipes, there's more comes to take its place."

"If it were not for that water," said Cooper, "there would be neither sugar nor anything else growing on these flats"; and I could well believe him, for hitherto the wealth of the crops, coupled with the apparent absence of water, had puzzled me greatly.

After our bath we sat talking by the shores of the lake until our light Siamese silk garments were dry, and then made our way back to Deverell's house for lunch.

"What would happen if you filled a boiler with kerosene instead of water?" enquired he of the inventive disposition, as we entered his dining-room.

"It would boil, I suppose," I answered.

"And if you plugged up the safety-valve and other holes?" continued Deverell.

"I expect the boiler would burst," I hazarded.

"Ah! then why does the Government not use nitro-glycerine, or gunpowder, for driving boats or flying-machines or anything? Suppose you had a barrel with string wound round it and some wheels fastened to whatever work you were going to do?"

"Well, what's the idea?" I ventured to enquire.

"Why, tie a shell or bullet to one end of the string and fire it off: the string would run out and turn the barrel, which would turn the wheels, and there you are."

"Bob," said Cooper, looking at his friend admiringly, "if you could only grow sugar with bombshells or gunpowder, you'd be prime minister of Queensland next week. But how would it do to put wheels on your shell and fire it along the railway? It would travel up to Townsville a good bit quicker than the old tram."

"Get out, John, you is no engineer," returned Deverell contemptuously. "You might as well fasten a magnet above your pine-apple patch to haul them up, or—Lor'! the very thing! How would a balloon and a lot of string do for drawing up the darned cane?"

"I think you had better come back to your cane-cutting apparatus," I advised, "or even your kerosene boiler"; and then the subject changed.

As we sat smoking under the vine-covered veranda after the meal was over, Hardy and some of my *Gabo* acquaintances drove up in two buggies, evidently having come direct from Ayr station, where Hardy had met them.

"Well, how's sugar?" cried Mr Mackechnie, the gentleman who had astonished me with his knowledge of figures and time-tables.

"I tell you, Bosses," began Deverell and Cooper simultaneously, "this is the best expert that ever struck this part." Cooper now stopped, but Deverell continued: "What he don't know 'bout sugar you would need four lawyers and two Chinamen to find out."



ABORIGINAL BOYS BATHING JUST ABOVE THE
FAMOUS BARRON FALLS, QUEENSLAND.

"We guessed that much," said one of the master planters. "Hardy has been telling us some of the things he has done already."

I modestly suggested that I had done nothing, but of course they would not hear me, and I made no further effort to belittle myself.

"'Scuse me, gentleman," said Deverell suddenly, "I have just got an idea." He ran off without waiting an answer, and Hardy informed me that we were now going to Mr Mackechnie's house to obtain some statistics and spend the evening.

We had not gone far when a loud explosion shook the ground, causing some Kanakas working near to indulge in shrieks of laughter. We looked back, and above Deverell's house saw a dense cloud of rolling vapour, which, from the blue, gaseous appearance, I suspected was the smoke of burning kerosene mingled with the volatilized gas of the same oil.

"That's Deverell's idea gone burst," laughed Winter.

"And his patent boiler too, I think, if not himself as well." I added, "Hadn't we better go back——"

"And gather the pieces left of him, you were going to say," said Hardy. "You needn't worry about that. Deverell has been here ten years without getting hurt, and I'm open to bet he'll be here for ever, or until he makes a mistake in mixing his drinks."

We drove on, and at length arrived at Glendilla, Mr Mackechnie's home. As soon as we were comfortably settled in his coolest room, with every man his favourite liquid before him, the gentleman of figures began: "As you have seen, we can grow ten tons of cane per acre, and have reason to expect that this season the crops on the irrigated patches will

yield thirty tons. There are sixty thousand acres of land in the Burdekin delta, of which eighteen thousand are at present under sugar; the rest will be, too, when the population increases, for all the soil is as good as Liliesmere, the first plantation. We get three hundred and twelve pounds of sugar and thirty-two pounds of molasses from every ton of cane passed through the rollers, and taking the ten-ton rate as an average, this means practically twenty-five thousand tons of sugar from the Burdekin alone. Of course we can also grow other things as well as most places in Queensland, but you, being only a sugar expert [I blushed], will not have the same interest in them. The work here is carried on under what is known as the small-grower system, the few original planters confining their attention to the management of their mills, and buying all the cane from the growers on their land at contract prices. We do not allow the cane to grow to seed, and in planting the usual method adopted is to plant young shoots cut from the old stems. Mr Hardy and I are the largest——”

“Here, old man, put on the brake; we’ve had enough of that,” cried Winter. “All the boys are sleeping, and the expert’s only listening through politeness.”

“No; I assure you I am very interested,” I cried. “I am now getting my first facts about the sugar industry.”

Mr Mackechnie drew a sheet of foolscap from his pocket, and, handing it to me, said: “You are the first expert I have met who showed any interest in the facts connected with the trade. Here is a paper I have written setting forth all my observations.

Take it, and if you can place it anywhere where it may be the means of sending us some good, honest white men not afraid of work——”

“Can you play cribbage?” interrupted one of the two I had seen playing on board the *Gabo*, and, despite my utmost efforts, I could not get any one to say another word on the subject of sugar.

After dinner the ladies entertained us with some music, and then the evening was given over to story-telling, card-playing, and, as the night was very hot, it is perhaps unnecessary to say to thirst-quenching, finishing up with a general discussion on the probable attitude of the Federal Government towards the Kanaka labour question.

I stayed two days longer with the sugar planters, and then announced that, in accordance with Mr Mackechnie's time-table, I would have to depart on the morrow.

“Well, name your fee, my boy,” said Mr Hardy, producing his cheque-book. “We have been very pleased to have you, and if you ever think of settling here, I will give you my home patch for nothing.”

“Thanks!” I replied. “I may come back here some day if luck goes against me in England.”

“You'll always be welcome, anyhow. But here, you can fill this ticket in for yourself. If you're going to the old country you'll need something substantial.”

“Mr Hardy,” I said, “I cannot take your money; as I told you at first, I am not an expert, and I knew absolutely nothing about sugar until I came here with you. I shall do all that ever was expected of me, nevertheless, and, having a friend on the staff of a Sydney paper, that is poor enough return for all

the kindnesses you have shown me, even though I were an expert."

"Expert be hanged!" roared the veteran. "You've earned your wages, and—Lor'!——" But his memory must have gone back to the time when he was a slave-raider, for his language changed to the deep, liquid-sounding words so popular in the sunny south.

Next morning I drove round and said good-bye to all my friends. Deverell informed me that he was "all-fired with an idea for an aerial railway from the mills to the wharves on the Burdekin," six miles distant, and Cooper wished to present me with a few tons of his produce, which, much to his disappointment, lack of means of transport compelled me to decline. Hardy and Winter accompanied me across country to Wangaratta station, on the Bowen railway, and from that point I caught all the connections exactly as Mackechnie had described, duly arriving in Sydney five days before the record-breaking *Gabo*. . . .

The Federal Government has now decreed that henceforth Kanaka labour shall not be employed in Australia. This Act has caused much discontent among the planters; but I have just heard that Deverell's patent cane-cutter has proved a success, being able to do the work of twelve men. If the present machine lasts until a duplicate is made, or if the inventor can remember how he got the "darned in-and-out cutting motion," and reproduce it in a machine fitted with steel bolts or rivets instead of the pieces of cord which tied his original together, I have no doubt that a new era of prosperity is about to dawn for the sugar-cane planting industry.

In the Land of the Tugeri

To the world wanderer there are few spots on the earth's surface which remain long unknown, for the dark corners of our little planet exercise for him a peculiar attraction which malarial swamps, hostile natives, voracious mosquitoes, and kindred pests can in nowise lessen or subdue. If, too, the pursuit of gold become his object, an irresistible incentive controls his efforts, and leads him into dangers so manifest, with a reckless enthusiasm that calmer spirits can only characterize as a species of madness begotten of much association with Nature in her gloomiest moods. And perhaps it is so.

Away to the north of Australia, guarded by numberless coral reefs and atolls, and lapped by the wavelets of an eternally summer sea, lies the island of New Guinea—a grim, forest-clad territory, which has claimed many a victim to the cause of knowledge, and which to-day stands a rather sad memorial of the failure of civilization to cope with extreme savagedom.

Some years ago I travelled extensively through the British portion of the island in search of gold and certain gem-stones supposed to exist plentifully on the upper reaches of the main rivers, but beyond having one or two unpleasant experiences with

blood-thirsty head-hunters, and thereby acquiring a knowledge of their fighting tactics, my party profited little otherwise, though I am still of opinion that vast auriferous areas will yet be discovered along the lower slopes of the giant mountain ranges in the far north-west—a district which we failed to satisfactorily explore.

We were trudging wearily along the banks of an unknown river, endeavouring to form a junction with a tributary of the Fly, which, I had imagined, would all but connect the two water-ways. It was early afternoon, and the dense forests lining the oily channel almost united overhead, forming a long, gloomy arcade, and we, as we battled our way through the entangling thicket, felt rather discontented with our lot, and hoped strongly that our course might soon lead through more open country.

“If we only had a boat,” grumbled my old comrade Mac, as he slashed viciously at some barring creepers, “we could vanish up that water like a streak.”

“But, as we haven’t a boat, we must be content without,” I said, somewhat shortly. “We can make a raft when we get on to the main river.”

“It strikes me, mates,” broke in Emu Bill, the Australian, at this stage, “it strikes me this here durned crocodile swamp is trending too much to west’ard to come anyways near the Fly, an’ in that case we’ll run into the Tugeri country mighty soon.”

Bill, for an ordinary bushman, had an excellent idea of geography, and in the present instance I could only admit that his observations were too truly correct. “We have been swinging round these last ten miles, boys,” I explained, “but I was in hopes

that we might swing back again in time to correct our deviation. Heaven only knows where the source of the stream is if it is not in Upper Fly ranges."

Phil, the geologist, who had been pacing quietly along in the rear, keeping a vigilant eye on the four native "boys" who carried our stores and mining implements, now spoke his opinion. "I shouldn't wonder if the hanged river slides round into the Dutchmen's territory," said he. "As it is, we are rather close to the boundary-line for my comfort."

I made no further remark, and for another hour we stumbled along in silence, our minds filled with dire misgivings. Then suddenly Mac gave a yell of delight, and leapt daringly down among the long reeds.

"There's a canoe here," he shouted lustily, "a big an' bonnie canoe which should just suit us!"

But as we made haste to join him he made a wild rush backwards, and I, who was nearest the water, saw a number of log-like creatures issue from the dank grasses with jaws hideously gaping.

"Crocodiles!" howled the doughty Mac, in tones of sheer disgust, when he had reached a position of safety; "dizzens o' the hungry brutes. We'll need to ca' canny, I'm thinkin'."

"Crocs!" grunted Emu Bill contemptuously; "hang the crocs! where's the canoe?"

And now I saw what had attracted our keen-eyed comrade's attention. Half-hidden among the rushes, with curved prow sunk deep in the mud, lay a cumbersome gondola-like craft of obvious native manufacture. With one accord we looked to our rifles, then cast a hasty glance up the river. Nothing but the placidly flowing waters met our view, and I

heaved a sigh of relief. For the moment I thought we had inadvertently stumbled into a native camp.

"I wonder how it got here, anyhow!" mused Emu Bill. "It's not just the place I should fancy for mooring a boat."

"I imagine it must have been carried down with the flood some days ago," ventured Phil. "The rains were pretty heavy when we were working round the coast."

The "boys" meanwhile had become unusually quiet, and, missing their chatter, I turned to find them gazing at the boat with eyes that seemed to bulge from their sockets. "What's the matter, Tommy?" I asked, addressing the most intelligent of the quartette. Then the four broke out at once:

"Tugeri, Tugeri, Nudi Kassi; boat belong a him. Kill ums, eat ums."

"Haud yer noise!" roared Mac. "Hoo daur ye talk about 'kill ums, eat ums,' ye onceevilized heathens?" Apparently the subject was distasteful to him. A fusillade of shots now rang out as Emu Bill and Phil emptied their Winchesters into the saurian-infested swamp, and with many a flop and plunge the scaly monsters slid greasily out into mid-stream, where they congregated, with jaws snapping angrily. Then, while my comrades were engaged drawing the strange craft farther inshore, I interrogated the trembling "boys," and pieced together their odd fragments of information.

"Me belong Bugi tribe," added Tommy tearfully. "Me know Tugeri. Hims stay up river, but hims come down sometimes. Then kill ums, eat ums——"

He finished off by giving an ocular demonstration of the Tugeri method of treating their victims, and

gulped vigorously several times as a fitting climax. Clearly Samarai Tommy had a wholesome dread of the Tugeri. The Bugis, who formerly occupied the lower Morehead valley, had been almost annihilated some months before by the fierce head-hunters from over the Dutch border. Little wonder that Tommy was afraid.

"She's as tight as a bottle," announced Mac gleefully, after a brief survey of our find, "an' there's paddles an' spears aboard, an'—an' what dae ye call this?" He held up for my inspection a long, tightly-stringed bow.

"It means Tugeri, Mac, sure enough," I answered, with conviction. "I have heard of them using bows and arrows. I wonder what we're going to do now!"

The boat was large enough to accommodate ten men, and was fitted as if for a long cruise. A stout anchor cable was particularly noticeable, one end of which was securely fixed to the stern post, while the other trailed loosely among the reeds. It contrasted rather oddly with the otherwise crude appurtenances of the vessel; probably it had been obtained on a recent marauding expedition to the coast.

"It at any rate proves conclusively that this river leads into Dutch country," said Phil, "for if not, how could a Tugeri boat drift down here? Unless," he added doubtfully, "unless the beggars are on the war-path just now, and have crossed over for their usual supply of heads."

"Let's get into the darned barge," growled Emu Bill impatiently. "There's nary a nigger will shift me."

"Nor me," bellowed Mac, placing his huge

elephant gun on the short ledge in the bow with a significant gesture.

For my own part I was by no means averse to making a trip up the river, though my better judgment protested against the venture. It was plain now that we could not hope to cross the divide to the western arm of the Fly, as we had at first anticipated doing; our river assuredly had its source in the far west, in the domain of the dreaded Tugeri.

"You must understand, then, boys," I said, as I stepped on board, "that we are taking more risks than we bargained for on this trip. We cannot expect to find gold so far away from the mountains, but we can fairly well calculate on getting into trouble with the natives."

"We can always turn when we see danger," urged Phil eagerly. "And I would like to know where the river rises."

That settled the matter so far as we were concerned, but it was different with the "boys."

"Kill ums, eat ums," they cried, drawing back in terror, and I believe they would have deserted us there and then had they not been afraid of our long-range firearms. In vain I appealed to them in choice dialect, and Emu Bill cursed at them in real bush vernacular, but all to no purpose. Then Mac put an end to the discussion by going quietly ashore and bundling the objectors into the boat two at a time.

"We canna gang withoot the engines," he muttered; "an' this is too hot a country for me to exert mysel' unnecessarily."

Another moment and we swept out into the current, and headed upwards through the deepening gloom at a very lively speed.

"How much dead wuns this?" feebly murmured Tommy between his efforts, tapping the barrel of my rifle nervously; and the ever-ready Mac, by way of giving him comfort, answered gruffly and inaccurately, "Twenty," at which Tommy's face expanded in smiles, and he eagerly enquired as to the powers of the other weapons, receiving in turn much astounding information, whereupon he grew quite cheerful.

"Tommy want see Tugeri Mamoose" (native chief), he mumbled bravely. "Me swipe him."

"Snag ahead!" warned Phil, and I steered to the left so as to avoid a great drifting tree, whose branches stretched out of the water like the tentacles of a huge octopus; and while thus seeking a safe course near the shore, the bow of our craft buffeted some yielding object with a hollow thud.

"More crocs," grunted Emu Bill, seizing a spare paddle and belabouring the inert obstructing mass diligently, but with little effect; then we sheered off into mid-stream again. And so we progressed, while the darkening shadows of night insidiously drew closer and closer, and the sombre forest began to echo with the vague cries of its myriad denizens.

"I guess we'll anchor for the night, boys," I said, steering with difficulty. "We'll be better on the water than ashore if we can get a safe grip of the bottom."

"There won't be any of them confounded snakes to trouble us," remarked Phil; "and that will be a blessing."

Mac had been employing himself to good purpose during the last half-hour, and he now exhibited a make-shift kedge anchor constructed from many and various sinkable materials, and, fastening it to the bow-

line, he stood ready to "let go" at the first favourable opportunity. It was so dark that even the comparatively near shores could not be distinguished, and I navigated at random, hoping to reach a shallow bar where we might "lie to" in security.

"I see something straight ahead," spoke Mac, waving his hand mysteriously as a signal to me to keep off to the right, which I accordingly did; then Emu Bill, who had been straining his eyes forward, exclaimed:

"Hang me if it isn't an island, mates, right in the middle of the channel!"

I motioned the "boys" to pull easy; but almost before we could realize it we were crashing through a fringing belt of half-submerged reeds.

"Back water!" I cried in alarm. "You've got mighty lively all of a sudden, Tommy."

"Me no pull," responded that individual. "Must be black devil aback o' me."

"None of the boys were pulling hard," said Phil in surprise. "I don't understand why we had such a way on."

Slowly we backed out from the muddy bank, and when well clear of all entangling vegetation Mac dropped the anchor; then we busied ourselves preparing supper and arranging our blankets for a night's sojourn on the waters.

"I have a curiosity to know what sort of island we have struck, boys," I said, when our frugal meal was over. "There doesn't seem to be any trees on it, and we might easily have a tramp round before turning in."

The moon was just beginning to show above the timber on the right, casting a pale reflection on the

eddying current, and illuminating ever so faintly the low-lying island stretching before us.

"I don't mind going exploring with you," yawned Emu Bill. "Mac and Phil here can wait an' see that nothing goes wrong with our man-o'-war."

"Mind the crocodiles!" roared the first-named gentleman, as Bill made a reckless leap into the water, splashing noisily. I followed less impetuously, marvelling much at the sluggishness of the oily stream at this point. There seemed to be absolutely no flow.

We reached firm ground with considerable difficulty, having first to traverse a patch of very boggy soil, into which our feet sank alarmingly at each step.

"It's darned funny," commented Emu Bill, "but I'll bet my boots that my feet bottomed on the other side o' that there swamp."

"What do you mean?" I asked in astonishment.

"Mean?" he echoed. "I mean that if Mac, for instance, had come ashore, he'd a sunk plumb through into deep water."

Whiz! Splash! I felt some object rush past my ear and strike the water at our back, and immediately after the air was filled with a peculiar cry, "Che-ep! che-ep!" which soon swelled into many such screams. The island seemed to be alive with hostile savages. Instinctively we dropped to the ground, just in time to evade a shower of arrows that whistled overhead.

"Howlin' snakes! We have got clean bested this time," muttered Bill, more in sorrow than in wrath. Then we turned and made a wild burst for the boat, and at that moment the boom of Mac's blunderbuss echoed thunderously through the night, intimating

that that wakeful warrior had fully realized the seriousness of our position.

"Che-ep! che-ep! che-ep!" came the shrill yells in our rear, as we floundered madly across the treacherous mire and through the bubbling ooze beyond. We reached the boat in an incredibly short space of time, and clambered over the gunwale with alacrity.

"Thank Heaven you've got back, boys!" said Phil, recharging his heated revolver. "We're going to be in a tough fix evidently."

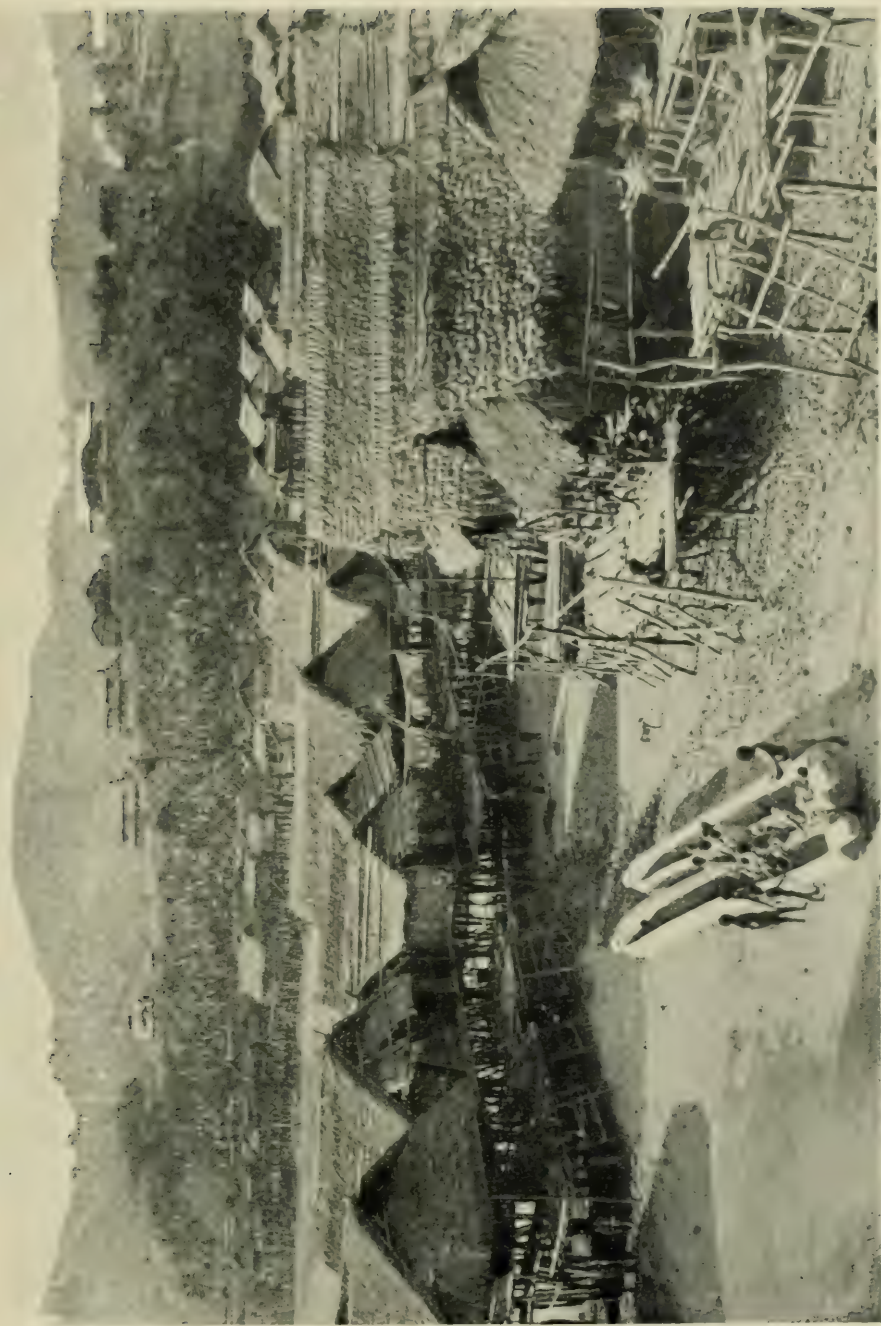
"Stand by the anchor, Mac," I cried; but he was there already, tugging and straining at the chain, which, however, refused to yield.

"It'll no' come up," he said desperately.

A fleeting glance I obtained of the "boys" showed them to be snugly ensconced at the bottom of the boat beneath our pile of blankets, and, taking advantage of a lull in the attack, I pulled Samarai Tommy from his comfortable quarters, and bade him and his compatriots prepare to paddle as they had never done before.

"Hims Tugeri," blubbered Tommy, "no get down river no more."

The continued inaction of our enemies surprised me greatly, for I dared not hope they had retired; so, while Mac endeavoured to cut the heavy shackles with hammer and chisel, we kept our eyes strained and our ears alert. Suddenly a bright blaze flared on the beach directly in front of us, showing about a dozen stalwart natives in the foreground; but a subdued murmuring from the vicinity of the scrub all round warned us clearly enough that the wily savages had some scheme on foot. Crack! crack! crack!



Lt. C. Haxton

NATIVE VILLAGE NEAR PORT MORESBY, BRITISH NEW GUINEA

went Mac's hammer ; a few minutes more and we should be heading down with the current. Then a tall, lithe warrior crept out through the reeds towards us, his hands outstretched, and, uttering the soothing words, "Bega-be-bega" (Peace, let us have peace), in what, I suppose, was intended to be an exceedingly friendly voice.

"Durn ye! What for you shoot arrows?" demanded Emu Bill, in the dialect used on the lower portions of the Morehead.

"You got boat belong o' us," came the reply. "We thing you Bugi men. You come shore, we give pig. Bega - be - bega." The speaker was certainly no ordinary specimen of his class ; probably he had received his early education at one of the mission stations on the coast. The offer of the pig seemed a genuine proof of friendliness, but we were inclined to be cautious.

"You tell Mamoose we come shore if no shoot," I said, by way of gaining time.

He turned and addressed some one unseen in the background in rapid language we could not understand ; then he faced me.

"Me Mamoose," he cried proudly. "We no shoot, you come shore."

The anchor cable at this moment parted, and I sprang to my steersman's perch astern, then, to my surprise, Tommy clutched me by the feet.

"You listen Tommy," he moaned ; "you no understan' him talk. Hims say to you, 'Bega-be-bega ;' hims say to Tugeri men, 'Be ready, them come.'"

"Tommy's right," growled Emu Bill, leaping to his position at the stroke oar. "But what the

howlin' blazes is the matter with the old barge? She's driftin' nary an inch."

The crafty Mamoose stood waiting expectantly, imagining our energetic behaviour to be occasioned by our extreme desire to get ashore as quickly as possible and partake of the promised roast pig. And here we were, in the middle of a stream which we had calculated to have a flow of over four miles an hour, yet standing stock-still.

"I know what's the matter, boys," Phil said quietly. "The entire island is floating."

He was right. Incredible as it may seem, reeds, scrub, and everything else were floating downwards with the current.

While we hesitated, deciding on our best plan of action, the impatient twanging of bow-strings sounded ominously in my ears, and the soft plash of many paddles farther up the river warned us that we had little time to lose. Mac, with studied carelessness, laid the barrel of his deadly weapon across the gunwale and in direct line with the prominent figure on shore. It was his grim way of preparing against contingencies. I felt sure that an overwhelming flight of arrows would be launched at us immediately the concealed natives realized that we had no intention of gratifying their cannibalistic lusts. If we could only get out of range without exciting suspicion, an extreme effort might give us a satisfactory lead on the swiftly-moving island. My first idea of allowing the boat to drift to a position of safety had proved hopelessly impossible. Again I addressed the Mamoose.

"You show where come," I said. "No good land here—plenty crocodile."

He laughed derisively. "White man 'fraid crocodile. White man baby."

It was clear that he was getting tired of the prolonged palaver, and it was also uncomfortably apparent that he already considered us as sure game. Yet he motioned us to go up stream with an eagerness that I was at no loss to understand—the canoes lay in wait above.

"Get as much cover as you can, boys, and ease off gently," I whispered. "We'll work over to the shadow of the timber, then swing round lively."

Phil and Mac had taken their positions at the bow, the "boys" crouched amidships, and Emu Bill, as I have noted, was at the stroke oar. Slowly we veered outwards, and, with seeming clumsiness, I manœuvred our heavy craft broadside on across the stream, expecting every instant that our trick would be discovered; but my awkward navigation was in our favour, and our prow still pointing up stream must have lulled suspicion. At last we were on the verge of the welcome shadows, and then only did I observe signs of alarm on the part of the canoeists close above. They commenced to propel their skiffs leisurely across, as if to intercept our upward progress. The Mamoose was but dimly discernible standing where we had left him.

"Now, boys," I said, working my steering-oar with a will, and causing our boat to swing as if on a pivot, "pull for all you're worth, and look out for arrows."

Before the words were well out of my mouth the unwieldy craft was cleaving the oily swells at record speed. For a brief moment a death-like silence reigned, then a pandemonium of hoarse yells and

shrill cries broke loose upon the night, and arrows showered about us like hail, but for the most part fell short, luckily for us. And now ensued a race between our heavily-laden vessel and the myriad canoes astern, for, though we drew speedily away from the dangerous island, we had not yet got safely out of the Tugeri clutches. Grimly Mac stood up by his perch in the bow, and the gaunt black barrels of his cherished gun sought out the foremost of the pursuing fleet and spat out their deadly leaden messengers; then he relapsed back in his seat, and pulled on his oar with renewed vigour.

“That’s a load off ma chest,” he remarked, with an audible chuckle. “The indignities I hae suffered the nicht hae been past endurin’.”

For over an hour we continued to ply our paddles vigorously, and by that time our savage enemies were left many miles in the rear. Their interest in the chase had slackened hugely after their taste of our power of retaliation, and for the rest of the night we drifted calmly with the flood. Ten days later we arrived at Port Moresby *en route* for civilization.

With the Men of the Yodda Valley

IN the heart of New Guinea, between the head-waters of the Mambare and Kumusi rivers, formed in the saddle-back depression connecting Mount Bellamy to an outflung spur, lies the Yodda Valley. It is about the last place on earth where one would expect to find white men, yet it is one of the rallying spots of those pioneers who have extended Britannia's boundaries to the uttermost corners of the globe. The Yodda is far from the influence of civilization. There are some who think that fact not the least of its attractions, but the vast alluvial gold deposits are probably what appeal to the majority of its frequenters.

The population of the Yodda is British, from the half-Chinaman half-Kanaka, who acts as police corporal, to the Resident Magistrate, who speaks with a slight accent suggestive of stern Caledonia. Between these two extremes are some reckless, hard-swearing Australians and a few quiet but determined New Zealanders. There is also a fair amount of English, Scotch, and Irish, Canadians, and South Africans, some Germans who would like to be British, and half a dozen Americans.

The Yodda Valley is sixty miles in length and about forty in breadth, and is evidently the recently-drained bed of a lake. The surface is covered with

slate drift and iron-stone, but a square foot which does not carry gold has yet to be discovered. Being the most distant outpost in New Guinea, the valley, besides forming a gold camp, is the head-quarters of the various parties of osmiridium-hunters, gem-seekers, rubber-traders, and others whose work is known only to themselves. Our party was not particular what it engaged in so long as there were prospects of success attached, and it was chiefly to obtain information concerning the various "chances" that we repegged an abandoned claim in the centre of the workings and pitched our camp thereon.

"Wal, strangers," remarked our nearest neighbour, a typical Australian, after we had done so, "ye is darned cheeky for new chums. Is ye not thinkin' me an' my mates might be wantin' that claim?"

"Can't say the thought ever struck us," replied Doc. "Suppose you bring out your mates and introduce them?"

"Lor', hear him!" ejaculated our parchment-faced friend. "See here, youngster, we is the bad lot of them fields, and if it weren't that I knows ye'll croak naturally when the lime-juice wears off ye, I'd swipe ye; but come an' have tucker in the meantime. My name's Larrikin Dan, and I'm an Ostralyan." He extended his hand as he spoke, and Doc and I grasped it in turn.

"I'm sorry we are not case-hardened yet," I said, as we followed him to his tent, "but we are only the ornaments of our party; the others have gone for stores."

"I is darned if I can see what they keeps ye for, then," commented Dan with refreshing frankness. "But here's my mates. This is the Wallaby, that's

Parley Voo, 'cause he's a Frenchy from Canada an' can't speak a darned word o' French, an' that chap outside cookin' is Cockney Bob from London, at least he was there fifty or a hundred years ago." Each gentleman stepped forward as his name was mentioned and enquired solicitously after the state of our health, the Frenchman volunteering the information that most people died after two seasons in New Guinea.

"I think you are under some misapprehension about us," said Doc, appropriating the hammock which Parley Voo had just vacated, and lighting his pipe. "We are hardly so verdant as we look, and in all probability will outlive our fellows. By the way, Dan, I see you are suffering from a slight attack of black-water——"

"What! darn ye! I'll——"

"No, you won't; you'll take this antipyrin tabloid."

"I'll be blowed, Larrikin, but you do look bad," laughed Cockney Bob, standing at the tent doorway. "Better take the pill; he ain't chargin' ye for it."

"And now, perhaps you will allow me to introduce our comrades," I said, seeing through the flap of the tent that those individuals were approaching.

"Great Papangi!" cried the Wallaby, "is them your mates? Here, Larrikin, who is the tall fellow? I has seen him afore somewheres."

"That is Starvation Sam of Queensland," I replied. "His companions are Emu Bill, Mac, and Kaiser, and our carriers. We have just come overland from Tamata, and are generally allowed to be able to do exactly what we please."

"O Lor'! mates, what has we struck?" wailed Larrikin Dan; "an' we thought they was new

chums, an' that big fellow is the hardest case in Ostralsya."

"Dinner is ready," interrupted Parley Voo'; and his words acted like magic upon all. But that dinner was destined to grow cold, for, as our companions came near, Emu Bill, who was in advance, called out: "A nigger has just come into camp with the report that the Warden has had a fight with the Papangis, and that a prospecting party has been made into tucker down on the Kumusi." This was alarming news. The men rushed out from the surrounding tents, and straightway all thoughts of dinner were banished from every one. Work was suspended for that afternoon, the men gathering in little groups to discuss the situation and to ascertain which parties were out prospecting. When evening came a general meeting was held in the smoke of the oldest miner's camp fire, and many and strange were the opinions there expressed as to what should be done by the miners, most of which were ruled out of court by the old miner as being contrary to British law.

"I vote we go and burst up the whole tribe," cried one miner.

"Your thinking-box is out of order, Bill," he was answered. "Don't you 'member when the boys went for the nigs at Walker's Creek?"

"What happened then?" asked some one, evidently a new-comer.

"The Governor-General came up to Tamata, and half a dozen of us had to stand our trial for manslaughter," answered the old prospector. "An' the R.M. nearly got the sack 'cos he didn't jump on us too. No, boys, we've got to go slow or we'll git the old man into trouble."

"That are a fact," agreed the men. "We mustn't bring the R.M. into it."

"I guess this country ain't up to much when the niggers can do as they like," said an American. "By the great Atlantic ! if it war' over whar' I come from I guess they would be blown into pulverized molecules in two shakes. But say, boys, ain't you all a bit skeert?"

"Well," replied the old prospector slowly, "ye see we're British here, an' we don't like to kill anything that's built on the same principle as ourselves, at least without taking equal chances of peggin' out."

"But ain't they cannibals, an' ain't they doin' their best to wipe us out?" cried the American.

"Mebbe ; but they hasn't got Winchesters, an' it wouldn't be fair to make them stand at the wrong end of ours."

"That's all very well, boys," cried Starvation Sam ; "but it seems to me you're mighty careful that they don't get the chance of standin' anywhere within miles o' ye. If we are to git the Yodda gold, we've got to show the Paps that we is the bosses ; an', anyhow, what about Smith's party that has been murdered, an' how about those comin' up the river now?"

Sam's words seemed to put the matter in a new light to most of the men, and finally it was resolved that a strong body of men should patrol the track between the camps and Angerita, keeping clear of the Warden, who was supposed to be camped at Koko, so that if they met the Papangis he could not be held responsible for the results by the Queensland authorities. This decided, the meeting broke up, each claim agreeing to furnish a representative in the morning. Our party tossed up a coin to

determine whom ours should be, and fate thus elected Emu Bill; but no suitable leader being among the other twenty men nominated, we also gave Doc to fill that position.

"Bring some o' the heathen hame wi' ye, Doc," cried Mac, as the little army moved off. "An' if they're very hungry, gie them a bite o' Bill there; they'll never need another."

"Right you are, Mac," laughed Bill. "I reckon I am not an easy mouthful for any man," which fact was very evident to all.

Some hours after the men had departed the Resident Magistrate or Warden arrived on the fields, having just missed the party through what must have been some skilful manœuvring on their part. He reported that he had had a fight in Papangi, and that twenty warriors had been hurt in consequence and two of his own police severely wounded.

"Did you hurt them badly, sir?" enquired one of his listeners.

"Well, I did not personally investigate," replied the Warden very politely, "but Corporal Dewars Perth here informs me that the climate of this part of his country is not conducive to rapid recovery."

"But surely, in the name of humanity, your men did all that could be done for them?"

"Oh yes!" said the Warden, "they buried them." His interrogator seemed desirous of continuing the conversation, but the miners intervened. "Time's up, Ananias," they shouted. "You'll get hurt yourself if ye don't get scarce."

"Who is he, Rohu?" the Warden enquired of one of the men as Ananias retreated.

"Don't know; he came up on the overland from

Holnecote Bay ; says he's a missionary, but he's not a bad sort, although he don't know much."

"He is a bit verdant," laughed the Warden. "Even the Governor-General himself knows what hurt means officially."

The Warden was a comparatively young man, but the deep-set lines on his face made him look past middle age. He was a good example of the type of Briton born to command, and in that far-off fringe of our empire he already had made his reputation. Unlike other nations which share the same island, Britain is more careful of the interests of the natives than of her own sons, the warden of each division being held responsible for the life of every native under his jurisdiction. Of course this means perpetual trouble with the reckless prospectors, who do not see why their lives should be of less value than the blacks', nor why a long report has to be furnished for every cannibal killed, while, if a white man is speared, the words "pegged out," and the date of the year carved on a tree above his initials by some comrades, are the last of him ; consequently the prospectors seldom wait for the natives to launch a spear before pulling trigger.

The Magistrate of the Yodda, however, was a man who usually acted without consulting either Brisbane or Port Moresby. He kept law among the whites without the aid of his excellent native police as effectually as though New Guinea were a suburb of London, and when a tribe got troublesome either had a convenient attack of malaria until his intelligent subordinates restored order, or innocently gave another tribe liberty to hunt and plant gardens near the affected part. In both cases

the results were the same, and the Warden achieved great fame.

"Well, men," he said, after holding his brief court in O'Flannigan's store, "you have an exceedingly bad track leading here. I have bridged all the creeks and blazed a new road to the 'jump off,' but you will have to finish it at your own expense, for I have already exceeded last year's estimate, and the fields are not yet promising enough to warrant further Government outlay."

"What's the good of a government if they can't make roads, anyhow?" cried several of the men. "We'll be jiggered if we make them."

"Then it's jiggered you'll be, gentlemen. But where's Ted Brown, and Alf Richards, and, and—— Why, the half of you are not here!"

"Some of the boys went out prospecting this morning, Boss," cried an antiquated specimen of humanity known as "Foxy." "They left their best regards for ye, an' hoped ye would get a good rest."

"Oh! I hope they will be successful, then;" saying which the Warden turned into his tent and the crowd dispersed.

While walking towards our camp a copper-skinned veteran accosted me with the enquiry: "Is you one of Scottie's men?"

"No," I replied shortly, slightly annoyed that I should seem a subordinate by reason of my comrade's more pronounced individuality.

"Then who in tarnation is ye?" growled the miner. "The Governor-General, mebbe, or a darned bishop?"

"Neither," I replied. "I am only a mineralogist, but your friend Scottie is of my party."

"Lor'! who would have thought it! I say, Boss, I don't mean anything, you know, but ye don't look as if ye could hustle a jigger flea outen yer boots, let alone handle a man like Scottie."

"Oh, I get along all right with most people after a five minutes' try. But what is your special trouble?"

"Same as most people's,—the three W's."

"Which means?"

"Want gold, want of sense, and I reckon I want out of this country. That's three, ain't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, here's another one to the bargain—I want to know what this darned stuff is?"

"That! Why, that's the richest specimen of platinum ore I've ever seen! Where did you get it?"

"Ah, my boy, but I've got enough savvy left to keep that little secret to myself!"

"Oh, as you please! but I thought I was too insignificant to be worth considering." I handed back the specimen he had given me and turned away. But the miner ran after me, crying: "Hold hard, Boss, there's no call to get rusty. If ye care to come with me, I'll take ye to the spot."

"And the conditions?"

"Not any. I reckon there's enough there for every man in the Yodda. The gully is only twenty-four miles north-east from here. It cuts through the divide into the Pidza somewhere, an' if we went light we could make it in a day."

I signified that I was quite agreeable if one of my comrades would also be allowed to form a member of the party. To this old Dave, as my new friend was

called, assented, and so next morning, accompanied by Kaiser, who was an expert in all matters pertaining to mineralogy, we set out, taking with us only one carrier, Tamata Tommy.

All day we journeyed through the slate drift and the sandal-wood which fringed the slope beyond, entering towards evening a dark gorge high up in the foot-hills.

"We is here," Old Dave, suddenly remarked, after we had travelled up the ravine for a mile. "This is where I camped last week when I came through."

"You must have splendid nerve," I said. "I would not camp a night here myself for all the gold I have yet found in New Guinea."

"Too mooch snakes, und dere is no smoke-scrub to keep away insects," murmured Kaiser, preparing to sling the hammocks, and then we set about the necessary supper operations.

It was a clear moonlight night, and when our meal was over, Dave wandered up the creek to see if the "darned stuff" was in the same place. Half an hour later he returned and laid down some blocks of quartz and some pieces of a strange conglomeration resembling mica in texture, but hard and brittle to the touch, and of a steel-blue colour, in parts tinged with red.

"Mine Gott!" exclaimed Kaiser, when he saw the latter substance, "we can go home any time, now; we vas millionaires. See, my knife not touch—Palladium!"

"And iridium, osmium, and platinum, Kaiser," I said, "at least in chloride form."

"Don't you reckon there's some gold too?" chimed in Dave.

"Shust keep quiet, you men," interrupted our expert, producing his pocket blow-pipe, microscope, and other instruments of a mysterious nature, which he at once proceeded to put into use. Breathlessly Old Dave watched him erect a screen for his face in front of the fire, but soon, grasping the idea, he punched a hole in the bottom of our gold pan and tossed it to him.

"Ta!" grunted Kaiser, pushing the little pipe through the aperture in the pan and blowing on the piece of ore in the fire.

"Great snakes! What smell does ye call that?" gasped Dave, coughing violently.

"Osmic acid," I said, as Kaiser rose to his feet with a triumphant expression on his smiling but half-roasted face.

"The chlor, now," he cried, fishing in his pockets for a phial of hydrochloric acid.

"You needn't trouble with the test for the other metals," I said. "They are all there without doubt, but in refractory compounds which will require fifty thousand pounds worth of plant to treat successfully."

Kaiser drew the substance from the fire and again examined it closely. "Shust so," he remarked, with a sigh, "we would need all the chlor in Australia to separate the platinum."

"Just my luck," groaned Dave. "I am always hot on gold and never get it; but say, Boss, the gold in this darned stuff must have come from somewhere. Suppose we look for the feeders?"

"No good," said Kaiser; "dey is all in de stomach of de mountain."

At this moment our carrier Tamata Tommy came sliding down through a clump of nettle-trees that

grew on one side of the gorge. "Hims git!" he cried, rushing into the camp circle, his eyes rolling and his teeth chattering as if they would drop out. "No good black fellow lives gully other side."

"Tell them we is not at home, then," said Dave, aiming an empty "bully beef" tin at a healthy snake just preparing to go to sleep in the folds of Kaiser's blanket.

"Don't make so much noise, Tommy, I vas sleepy," said Kaiser; then, seeing the intruder in his sleeping-place, he gingerly forked it out and seized the tomahawk. "I wonder vas dere any more of you," he remarked, after despatching it. "Ach, go away! Tommy——"

"Black fellow eat hims (you). No kill hims first. Ha! here them comin' up the gully now. Zuns ovza zee——"

Tommy's improvised death-chant ceased suddenly, for he caught sight of the tail-end of a second supper among the scrub we had prepared for a smoke to drive the insects away. A luscious iguana will at all times afford more material satisfaction to a semi-civilized New Guinean than a death-chant, so Tommy at once gave his best attention to capturing that delicacy.

"I believe the nigger's right," said Old Dave, listening intently. "There is some heathens comin' up the gully. Better get up an' get yer gun ready, Germany." Germany did not answer. I think he was asleep, for he did not seem to hear the noise a warrior made in falling over a bamboo that we had cut near the mouth of the gorge, nor even the loud battle-cry "Da-a-am," which next moment re-echoed down the ravine.

"I don't know that cry," I muttered, as we silently moved back into a dark recess at the base of the cliff.

"I've heard something like it somewhere," said Dave thoughtfully, "but I is darned if I can place it."

"It might be Ta-ma-te with the last syllable drowned out," I ventured. "Only the tribes who use that cry are on the coast and quite friendly. There it is again. What black fellow that, Tommy?"

But the loss of the iguana must have affected Tommy's brain, for he only laughed hysterically in reply.

"Lor'! but they is curious nigs," whispered Dave. "Just hear them puffing and gruntin' same as white men."

"They have stopped," I whispered, peering into the gloom beyond the fire. "Probably they see our camp and are chary of rushing us."

"Don't let that worry you," said Dave. "They would spear or sling us first and 'vestigate afterwards. But—ss! Lor'! I hear one o' the beggars crawlin' along the side o' the rock. He's a darned 'quisitive nigger, anyhow. Let me over there to talk love to him when he comes."

"Stay where you are, Dave," I ordered. "I am quite able to attend to this gentleman."

"You!" spluttered Dave. "Great snakes! he'll eat ye standin'. Lor'! here he is."

I did not answer, but hurriedly fixed a length of bamboo between the side of the rock and a detached boulder, and before Dave had time to take my place the advancing scout tripped over the obstacle and fell forward. I assisted him downwards to the best of my ability; but he seemed to have enormous strength, and would have regained his feet had not Dave

promptly jumped on him. His startled shouts, however, must have awakened Kaiser, for he fired three shots in succession, and then, with a strange cry, rushed out among some prancing forms who just then appeared round our fire.

"Here, keep your grip on this beggar's throat," cried Dave. "The German's gone mad, an' I must stand by him." He sprang over our protecting boulder as he spoke, and I confined my attention to our prisoner. He had now ceased struggling, and was evidently repeating his death-chant, but the words were of such a strange, deep-vowelled nature, and chanted with such expression, that I hauled him into the moonlight and discovered — Larrikin Dan!

"Well, is ye goin' to finish me?" he gasped, when I relaxed my hold.

"I hope not, Dan," I answered; "but what are you doing here? I say, boys," I continued, before he found breath to speak, "I know what word that battle-cry was now." But my comrades had also made the same discovery. They, with two men whom I at once recognised as Cockney Bob and Parley Voo, were estimating the damage done to our cooking utensils by Kaiser's three shots.

"May I be eternally drowned in quinine if this isn't the curiourest reception ever I got," began Dan, stepping out. "Lor'! boy, I didn't 'spect you could take a grip on a man's throat like what you did; you must have had a powerful lot o' practice."

"Never did it before, Dan, and hope never to do it again," I answered. "But hadn't you better sit down and explain while we get some tea ready?"

"There ain't any explains about it. We saw you

leave camp this mornin', and reckoned you was goin' to some strike yous had made. We reckoned if there war' anything in that line goin' on, we, bein' yer nearest mates, ought to share in it, so we followed ye. There ain't no law against that, is there?"

"None, Dan."

"Well, we kept on an' on without any tucker till we thought yous was goin' to cross New Guinea, an' then when we saw your fire I came up quiet-like to see what was on the move, an', if ye had spare tucker, to let yous knows yous had hungry white neighbours."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Kaiser, the tears streaming down his face, and, his merriment proving infectious, we all joined in.

A few minutes later we sat down to a second supper, during which Kaiser resumed his interrupted sleep, and I informed the new-comers of the nature of Dave's find, adding that, unless a railway were built to the coast to carry the ore away, or a larger chemical plant established than was as yet in the Southern Hemisphere, two sovereigns a day was the utmost a man could hope to earn by extracting the various minerals.

"I reckon we can make more than that on the Yodda," said Dan, "an' have all the chances tacked on too."

"Better stay there, then," I advised, inverting our empty provision-bag; "and if you want to make money, start a store."

"Talkin' about tucker," broke in Old Dave, "Tommy there says there's a camp o' black fellows across the ridge, and if we run against them——"

"Well, what about that?" said Cockney Bob, who was supposed to know the country well. "I know

Old Beelzebub, the Mamoose of the village on the other side, and we can go to-morrow if your tucker is played out and strike him for some."

"Oh, there is a village, then!" I exclaimed. "That's what Tommy was driving at. But I understood the inhabitants of these parts were all cannibals?"

"Well," growled Old Dave, "they can't help that, can they?"

"I don't know," I replied; "but I am quite willing to pay them a visit if you are."

"We'll call it settled, then," said Cockney Bob, "for what's the use of going home hungry if Old Beelzebub can supply us, even though he is a cannibal." No more was said on the subject, and shortly afterwards we killed all the snakes within reach and went to sleep.

Next morning at sunrise we scaled the cliffs, and saw Beelzebub's village nestling among some cocoa-nut groves and yam plantations about six miles distant. The village stood on the bank of a river, which seemed to have its source just over the divide from where our late camp was.

"That creek goes into the Pidza," said Cockney Bob to me. "I prospected it two years ago, and that's how I know Old Beelzebub."

"Let's get along, I is hungry," said Larrikin Dan; and without more ado we started down the slope, and after two hours' careful travelling along a winding, stake-planted native pad, we reached the bamboo stockade surrounding the village.

"Where's the road in?" I enquired, as the pad suddenly stopped at the outside of the defences.

"Here's one way, anyhow," cried Larrikin Dan,

swinging himself into a tree, and crawling out on a branch which reached over the stockade.

"Be careful," I advised. "They must have seen us coming, and may give you a hotter reception than you had last night."

"I reckon I'll risk that," Dan answered, holding up to view a fibre ladder, which dropped inside from the branch, and next minute, despite Tamata Tommy's entreaties, we were all on the other side of the barrier.

"But where is the population?" cried Parley Voo, as we made our way through the "garden."

"Never mind," grunted Old Dave, "you'll see them soon enough;" and, halting a minute later in front of a large, curiously - constructed building, which from its size, shape, and fantastic adornments we knew was the Pouri - Pouri man's dwelling, or Tapu house, we saw the door, which was twelve feet above the ground, open, and Mamoose Beelzebub himself slid to the ground.

"Bega-be-bega," he began falteringly; then, seeing Cockney Bob, his face brightened.

"My mates," said Cockney Bob, indicating us with a wave of his hand. "We have come for some tucker."

"Me no sell tucker," said Beelzebub curtly.

"We're not particular about that," said Old Dave. "We don't mind being your guests."

"Hims give pop—pop—pop, then?"

"No, you old heathen," roared Dave, "you'll get no pop—pop—pop."

"Hims go 'way, git tucker?"

"I don't reckon as any of us have any notion of staying here," said Larrikin Dan. "Some carriers

I had stayed with you before. Lor'! Germany, see these bones over there. My eye! look at that crocodile under the piles of the dubu. It's too gorged to get out——"

"Come," suddenly said Beelzebub, as Cockney Bob began to explain, "tucker over in yam dubu." As he spoke he led the way past some smaller dwellings and tree-houses to a yam-shed which stood as far back from the river as the stockade would allow.

Beelzebub, as he was called, was a fine specimen of the New Guinean savage. He stood over six feet in height, and was built in proportion. He had a six-inch peg fastened through his nostrils, and various other adornments were appended to his ears, while every part of his body which was not covered with several dilapidated garments — which I strongly suspected were parts of a lady's wardrobe — was decorated profusely with red-and-white snakes. As he disappeared, doubtless to summon attendants, Cockney Bob informed me that he had at one time been an important chief nearer the coast, but it having been discovered that the miners' carriers were always deserting, or, at any rate, going amissing when near his village, he had to remove farther up stream, where, by a very simple process common to most New Guinean tribes, he soon became mamoose or chief again. "And you can bet your bottle of saccharine that he didn't get that mutton round his bones by dining on yams and cocoa-nuts alone," Old Dave added. And I quite believed him.

As if by magic a crowd of women now appeared and eyed us wonderingly.

"Ach, go away!" cried Kaiser, dropping his rifle

in disgust as one substantial charmer came up and threw her arms round his neck.

"See what it is to be handsome, Germany," laughed Parley Voo, clutching at the fallen rifle just as it became endowed with self-moving powers.

"Gott! I will shoot the next frau——"

"You have not the tools with it to do," interrupted Parley Voo; and then Kaiser became aware that his revolver, pocket-knife, and microscope had disappeared. At this moment some old men came forward with a pig, a few cocoa-nuts, and some yams, and various other substances with which I was not acquainted.

"Me good black fellow. White man's brother. No know 'bout fight Big Boss (Warden)," cried the Chief smilingly, advancing from their midst. "Me like pop—pop—pop."

"I hope you have not been eating any prospectors of late?" Parley Voo observed casually, moving off with Tommy on a tour of inspection.

"Fair play, Frenchy," cried Cockney Bob. "Don't insult a fellow's pals. Beelzebub only eats his enemies."

"Um! No want fight white fellow," cried Beelzebub, evidently appreciating Cockney Bob's intervention, but anxiously following our carrier's movements with his eyes. "They come up village, camp an'——"

"Who came up to your village?" roared Dave.

"White fellow; they go 'way soon. Me no' like kill. Like pop—pop—pop for tucker. Me speak good? My word!"

"You're not too bad for a heathen, Beelzebub," said Larrikin Dan, "so here's a fortune for you in

pennies. Go and buy a pop—pop—pop for yourself. You'll get the very latest down at Smith's store at the Bogi camp."

"Boys, we'd better pay the old heathen on the square, so as he can't go and report we stole his tucker," said Old Dave.

"No, no," cried the Chief, catching Dave's words and grasping their purport with remarkable intelligence. "White fellow brother; take all Beelzebub's tucker. He good fellow now. No want nothing. My word. Stay dinner with me. Me like white brother——"

"Roasted?" muttered Old Dave.

But the Chief ignored the insinuation with a quiet dignity that was very impressive, and probably we would have complied with his request and stayed to dinner had not Parley Voo returned at that moment and, in a careless tone of voice, said, "*Allez-vous-en vite!*"

"Oh," I said, endeavouring to rake up my French, "I understand!"

"I thought you vas not know French?" said Kaiser, addressing Parley Voo; but the latter gentleman only laughed, and began transferring the stores to our provision-bags.

"Have you ever heard the story of the spider and the fly, boys?" I said indifferently.

"I reckon so," grunted Old Dave, looking up quickly.

"Then we are flies now," I continued.

A gleam of intelligence passed across my comrades' faces, and Cockney Bob at once began to explain to the puzzled Chief that we had a pressing engagement elsewhere, and so could not accept his kind invitation.

Shortly afterwards we shook hands with Beelzebub and leisurely took our departure.

"Well, what's the matter?" I enquired of Parley Voo, when we found ourselves on the safe side of the stockade.

"Nothing much. There's an oil launch lying among the reeds, and the Tapu house is filled with warriors."

"Oh!" said Cockney Bob, "that means a circus coming. I was wondering where he had hidden his men. But there's Tommy; he'll tell us all."

I turned and found Tommy by my side, evidently in a great state of terror.

"Git, git!" he howled frantically. "Hims all be eaten."

"Time enough after tucker," said Larrikin Dan; "I is hungry now."

"You said that once before, Tommy," admonished Kaiser. "How vas——"

Tommy drew from a recess in his trousers Kaiser's microscope and handed it to him. "Here your big little; woman not want it now," he said simply; and we did not ask for further particulars on that subject. "Pouri-Pouri house full warriors," Tommy continued. "They kill lot black fellows down to Gobi. Big feast three nights. Now joined Papangis and go kill all white fellows at Yodda; more feast. Me know one fellow once carrier-boy to Big Boss, he tell me. Git!"

"I rather think we will, Tommy," I said. "But I cannot understand why Beelzebub allowed us to depart just now if he has such kindly intentions towards white men."

"We were safe with the old devil so long as we

were under his protection and didn't break Tapu," answered Cockney Bob. "And, anyhow, he intends getting us to-night, pop—pop and all. I saw that much in his eyes when he told us about the whites coming to his village. Poor beggars! I expect it was Elliot's party. They had an oil launch, at any rate."

"I forgot to say that I pushed it into the water," said Parley Voo, "and, if I do not mistake, that is it snagged on the bank now."

We walked towards the stranded launch, and had just discovered that, although the little engine was intact, there was no naphtha or fuel-spirit on board, when a pandemonium of yells burst out in the direction of the village.

"Howling Billy!" ejaculated Cockney Bob. "They're coming."

"And we're going," cried Parley Voo, leaping into the vessel.

"I reckon we is," agreed Old Dave; "but, Lor'! I was never inside a kerosene kettle afore."

"Never fear, old boy," growled Dan, as I pushed off with a long bamboo, "there ain't no kerosene here. If there war', we might sail this kettle to China or England, but as it is, I reckon we'll have to trust to Providence."

Down the rushing waters we were carried at a six-knot speed. On either side huge crocodiles skurried among the reeds, and their distended sides were to us more expressive than words as to what had happened in the vicinity recently. The fearful sounds behind us never ceased, but, gradually growing fainter, gave us the impression that we were outdistancing our pursuers, and half an hour later

we shot into the gloom of a dense forest of towering palms which fringed the river banks and made our surroundings quite dark. Expecting every moment to see the natives appear among the trees with their slings and rushing-discs, we did not stop to admire the effect, and suddenly our stream burst into a larger river, and we found ourselves drifting helplessly among cross currents.

"I reckon we is goin' down to Australia this trip," said Larrikin Dan, endeavouring to assist my steering efforts with a bamboo rod; but as the little craft had no momentum of its own, this was not an easy matter.

A loud "Hallo!" from the bank we had just left on our stern interrupted further speech, and looking round we saw a crowd of men, among whom I recognized Doc, Emu Bill, and the Wallaby, gesticulating wildly. Apparently they had realized the helplessness of our plight, for a canoe with a rope attached was pushed off from the bank, and, by fastening on to it as it drifted past, we were pulled ashore, where, in a few minutes, we made the men aware that the native tribes had combined for the "wipe out" of the white men of the Yodda Valley.

"That explains why we found all the villages between here and Koko deserted," said Doc. "They have all agreed to sink their differences to make common cause against the Yodda men."

"Then let's go and wipe them out now," suggested a miner.

"Not much!" cried several in chorus. "We'll get a darned curious kind of thanks from the Government for the job. Let them come to us, and then it's different."

"But what about Clarke's party?" I enquired. "Elliot's, I fear, is now past all need of help."

"Clarke's men are with us," answered Doc. "We found them camped here. They say Elliot and party went up stream a fortnight ago."

"Then let's get back to the Yodda an' give the Warden the tip to clear out afore the fun starts," cried a grizzled veteran; and, acting on that advice, a general move was made at once.

Sundown found us near the friendly village of Koko, but for obvious reasons we preferred to camp outside; and next morning, after advising the natives to accompany us to the Yodda, we set out again, our advance guard striking the camps in the afternoon. I was among the first lot, and, greatly to my surprise, when the Warden's tent came in sight I saw that gentleman, Mac, and Ananias sitting under the fly smoking cigars in peaceful contentment, while Starvation Sam was lying on the ground near making himself a suit of clothes from the magisterial Union Jack.

"Get out yer guns, Boss, or else clear," cried Old Dave, as we approached; "the niggers are out everywhere and are coming for us. We don't want you to get into trouble with head-quarters, so you know what to do."

"I really can't understand you, men," spoke the Warden, with a touch of annoyance in his voice. "I suppose you mean to tell me that the Mamoose Beelzebub is on the war-path?"

"You bet he is," cried the miners.

"Then I wish you would allow me to know my own business, and copy the example of this gentleman." Here Mac rose, and, taking the cigar from his mouth,

was probably about to say something, but, catching sight of me, he promptly sat down again.

"But, great snakes! Boss—you—we—— Here, you speak——" Old Dave turned to me in desperation, but several others coming up just then, and all beginning to speak at once, I was spared the trouble.

"Men, I would advise you to get to your work without delay," interrupted the Warden, "otherwise I may be compelled to retract my promise about the Holnecote Bay road. Oh yes! I know all about the intended massacre. Mr Ainton here (Ananias), who has come as a missionary to the white heathen of the Yodda, informed me of it the morning he arrived here; and while you were away trying to run against trouble, this gentleman (Mac) and his tailor comrade there unearthed a forty ounce nugget in their claim."

"What!" yelled all.

"I have it inside now," continued the Warden; "and as it affords substantial proof that the Yodda is worth systematic development, I am advising a Government road to be constructed."

"Lor', boys, it's time we wasn't here!" cried Larrikin Bob. "But what about the niggers, Boss?"

"Oh, one of the Mambare tribes happened to be over on the Kumusi on a hunting trip. Unfortunately they paid what I trust was a friendly visit to Beelzebub's village yesterday, some time in the forenoon, and my police have not yet reported to me how many of either are still alive." . . .

"An' dae ye actually tell me that ye left this stuff because there didna happen tae be a river or twa o'

nitric, sulphuric, and hydrochloric acids beside ye?" said Mac that evening, as the boys gathered round to hear our story.

"Shust so," answered Kaiser, feeling supreme in his knowledge of chemistry. "Can you do better?"

"Ay can I," said Mac, laying a specimen of the gorge mineral on a block of iron-stone and crushing it with his pick. "There's such things as mechanical combinations," he continued slowly, carefully gathering the resultant powder, "an' this is ane o' them. Noo, ye dinna need chemicals to extract the gold an' plantinum frae that; ye can wash them oot wi' water in a pan."

So it proved; and "Dave's Find" is at present one of the most promising centres of the Yodda.

On a Colonial Coaster

“THE new swift steamer *Woolloomoolloo* will sail from Grafton Wharf to - night at 6 P.M. for Melbourne, Adelaide, and West Australian ports. Passengers are requested to be on board at least one hour before sailing-time.”

The above notice was conspicuously displayed in the doorway of an office in George Street, Sydney, and on reading it I at once stepped inside for further particulars. I was going beyond all Westralian ports, however, being bound for London; but as all the berths in the direct mail-steamers were engaged for some months ahead, I had formed the idea of proceeding to Fremantle, W.A., whence I knew the S.S. *Karrakatta* sailed for Singapore on the first day of the following month, connecting with the homeward-bound China mail-steamer from that port. It was now the fifteenth, and I therefore concluded that the *Woolloomoolloo* would land me in Fremantle with some days to spare.

“Best be down sharp to time,” the clerk advised me, as I booked my passage. “Remember, we neither refund your money nor give you a transfer if you miss the boat.”

“I have travelled on an Australian coaster before,”

I said ; and the clerk grinned and handed me my ticket.

“I suppose you are broke, and in a hurry to get back to the gold-fields?” he insinuated confidentially.

“I suppose so,” I answered wearily. “How many passengers will there be?”

“You make the hundred and fiftieth from here ; but there will likely be another hundred from Melbourne, and sixty or so from Adelaide—without counting the steerage, of course.”

“What speed can the *Woolloomoolloo* make?”

“Seventeen knots, easy. She’s the crack steamer of the Australian coast, you know.”

“She certainly is, if that is true,” I responded, departing. “Even the fastest P. & O. mail-steamers would find it difficult to keep up that speed.”

Determined not to lose my chance of travelling on this phenomenal flyer, I hastened to the “Metropole” and sent my traps down to the steamer, then, after partaking of some refreshments, I made my way down King Street and along Sussex Street towards the — Shipping Company’s wharves. It was two o’clock in the afternoon when I passed through the office at the entrance sheds. The *Woolloomoolloo* was lying alongside, flying the signal of immediate departure, and seeing that most of the passengers were already in evidence, I at once went on board, and exactly twenty-four hours later the *Woolloomoolloo* cast off her moorings and slowly steamed down Darling Harbour.

According to advertisements the gallant craft had a displacement of four thousand tons, but probably less than half that weight ever paid dock dues. She was a comfortable vessel, with large dining-saloon,

smoke- and music-rooms, and the usual social hall indispensable to all Australian coasters. Being only twenty hours late in leaving Sydney, few of the passengers were yet fully acquainted with their way about the ship, consequently most of the gentlemen were still congregated around the bar; but the more venturesome ladies had already discovered and appropriated the smoking-room.

But the *Woolloomoolloo* had to regain lost time, and hearing the engine-room telegraph-bell ring out "full speed" as we rounded Millar's Point into the crowded waters of the main harbour, I leaned over the gunwale and speculated on the amount of North Shore and Mosman's Bay ferries we should run down. For a time it seemed as if half the Sydney flotilla were to be swept from existence by the *Woolloomoolloo's* resistless prow. The ferry *Kirribilli* just cleared herself as she shot across from Circular Quay to Milson's Point, and the little Rose Bay steamer left part of her new coat of paint on our sides while endeavouring to effect a passage between us and the Messageries Maritimes *Armand Behic*, which was being drawn out to mid-stream stern foremost by two tugs. A coal barge and a Norwegian sailer next yielded the right of way, and then three ferries in succession raced across our bows a few feet ahead. An incoming coaster now claimed our attention, but I fancy the two captains knew each other and the weight of the opposing craft, for we passed safely with at least fifteen feet to spare. Next moment, however, we carried away part of the stern of a horse-ferry that was too tardy in its movements, and then grazed Pinch-Gut Island in virtuous endeavour to give plenty of room to a Japanese tramp that had just that morning hauled down the

ominous Yellow Jack. There was now nothing between us and the Heads, although H.M.S. *Royal Arthur* lay invitingly half a mile away on our starboard, and the P. & O. steamer *China*, which had just arrived from London, was discharging helplessly in Athol Bight on our port.

But in my anxiety to see how our noble vessel would run the gauntlet I had neglected to keep an eye on the stern, and was only aroused from my unpardonable forgetfulness when a series of frenzied shouts in true Australian dialect arose from the after part of the ship. I looked back, and then hurriedly filled in my name in the insurance coupon of my "Sands" N.S.W. time-table, for the Manly steamer *Brighton* was bearing swiftly down upon us, with black smoke belching from her twin funnels, and the surge flying in scintillating cascades from her bows. Rapidly she sped down the foaming waters in our wake, her passengers shrieking words of withering sarcasm to those on our deck, who, in an equal state of excitement, replied in the choicest Sussex Street vernacular. What happened next I do not know, for the belated luncheon-gong sounding at that moment, I rushed below, so as to obtain peaceable possession of the seat at table for which I had already heavily bribed the chief steward, and when I came on deck three-quarters of an hour later, we had left the Heads behind, and were serenely sailing over the placid waters of the Pacific, with Botany Bay three miles to starboard, and the South Pole somewhere about fifty-six degrees in the other direction.

"I beg your pardon, but have you been to sea before?" suddenly said an imposing-looking gentle-

man, appearing at my side as I sat under the shade of the bridge-deck.

"A little bit," I answered. "Why?"

"Because I would like to get a few wrinkles, and you know if you ask any of the ship people they take advantage of you."

"I shall be happy if I can be of any service," I said, accepting a proffered cigar.

"Thank you! My name is Woodhouse. I am the export manager of L—— & Co., and I am going over to West Australia to arrange about the opening of a branch establishment for the firm there. I have never been out of Sydney in my life, so I feel just a little bit at sea now."

"You will soon get over that," I consoled. "Few of our companions seem to be any more used to the sea than you are."

"Oh yes! I suppose we are all in the same boat so far as that is concerned," cheerfully spoke my friend, apparently unconscious that his metaphor was a trifle perplexing. "But for the sake of instructive conversation, may I ask when are we likely to arrive at Melbourne?"

"I believe fifty hours is the usual coaster time for the run."

"But this is the fastest steamer in Australia?"

"Yes; so I was told. She is making nine knots just now."

"Dear me! That is ninety miles an hour, isn't it?"

"Not quite. A knot is only a mile and about a sixth."

"Do you say so? A moment, please, till I note that." He jotted the information on a tabulated page of a diary headed, "Strange facts about the sea,"

and then continued : " Now, the next question that occurs to me is—What sort of fish do they catch with that long line trailing behind the ship?"

" That is the patent log," I answered, concentrating my thoughts on the price I had paid for some traveling requisites in Brisbane to prevent myself smiling. " It indicates the speed we are sailing on the dial fixed near the stern post."

" But the chief steward told some of us that all the fresh fish we used on board were caught with it. Ah ! here is my friend Mr Greenhead. I am getting some useful information, Mr Greenhead. This gentleman has had a varied experience of the mysteries of the deep."

" Ah yes !" observed the gentleman addressed last, a portly, good-humoured-looking individual with a snap-shot camera in his hand, " those who go down to the sea in ships see many strange sights." He said these words with such a subtle air of wisdom that I at once concluded he had previously sailed on a North Queensland sugar-boat, but he deprecated the suggestion. " No," he said, " I've never crossed any water other than Sydney Harbour in my life, but I've read nearly all Clark Russell's books."

I was silenced. Assuredly nothing could happen on the *Woolloomoolloo* to surprise Mr Greenhead. Before we had exchanged many words, however, the captain came forward and invited us to adjourn with him to the saloon. In compliance with this request we moved towards the companion way, but when passing the engine-room entrance we saw half a dozen gentlemen being bundled unceremoniously therefrom out on to the deck, and of course stopped to enquire the reason of their haste. That was soon evident.

"Ye'll gang whaur ye like, will ye?" roared the voice of the chief engineer, as he forcibly assisted the last person from his domain. "Weel, just gang; but if I catch ony o' ye doon here again, I'll mak' ye into a new patent lubricant for the propeller shaft."

"But the captain told us we could go down and see the machinery," remonstrated one.

"Did he? Then tell him I'll dae the same wi' him if he comes," shouted the exasperated Scot from within his doorway. "Ma men hae enough to dae to keep this barnacle trap moving on the meeserable twenty-five hunderweight o' coal allooance without haein' your kind nosin' aboot them."

"Let us get below at once, gentlemen," said the captain to us. "This is too dangerous a quarter for me;" and, catching a back view of the stalwart lord of the engine-room as he retreated, still breathing slaughter, all agreed that the captain's advice was commendable.

When we came aloft again we were well down the coast. A concert was in progress in the social hall, the smoke-room was doing duty as a nursery, and the music-room was filled literally to overflowing with victims of *mal de mer*, so, forced to betake ourselves to the after-deck, we joined a company there who were excitedly watching the movements of the steering-gear.

"It's that chain that hauls the steamer along," said one man, whom I could see was a gold-miner returning to Western Australia.

"What do you know about navigation?" enquired another sarcastically.

"I say that is the thing that turns the big wheel affair down in the water."

“Dear me !” remarked Mr Woodhouse, “I must make a note of that.”

The captain laughed.

“Yes, do,” he said, “and you’d also better note that a man goes down over the stern to oil that thing twice a day. D——! What are you doing, you fellows?” He sprang upon a man who was bending over the jerking steering-chain and hauled him backwards on the deck.

“Ten to one it stops the affair,” yelled the prostrate one. And it did. He had inserted a bolt in one of the chain-links, and before any sober-minded person could reach the spot the rudder swung round, and the chain moving correspondingly, the studded link caught in the casing and snapped. Fortunately the sea was calm at the time, and two hours sufficed to repair the damage done by the free ends of the broken chain. Nothing further happened during the afternoon ; but, missing two table-companions at dinner, and knowing that they were Queensland back-blockers, and therefore gifted with a prospecting disposition, I organized a search-party, and found them at the bottom of the half-empty forward hatch, down which they had fallen. I mildly suggested to the chief officer that hatches were usually closed before leaving port, but he did not appreciate my observation until some of the mining fraternity threw him down the hatch among the flour-sacks and asked how he liked it. He did not like it, and threatened to put every sand-groper on board in irons ; but as he could not very well do so without first coming up out of the hold, the sand-groppers took care that his ideas underwent a change before they pulled him up. Shortly afterwards, while all the passengers were gathered in

the saloon, two stewards brought forth an instrument of the phonograph variety, and announced that those who would not pay sixpence for the pleasure of listening to its sweet melody would have to go on deck. They were unwise stewards. Probably they had been in the habit of treating all passengers in this manner during their first night at sea, but this time the ocean was as smooth as the great central desert, and they were instantly pitched through the doorway, and their gramophone given over to the tender mercies of some very intelligent children in the smoking-room. An hour later most people, being tired with their day's work, turned in, and when the breakfast-gong awakened them next morning the *Woolloomoolloo* was off Twofold Bay, with the snow-clad peak of Mount Kosciusko gleaming in the distance.

During the day I cultivated the acquaintance of some of my fellow-travellers who seemed endowed with original traits, explaining to the best of my ability the many puzzles pertaining to ship matters, and generally acting as arbitrator in their many disputes. We passed Gabo Island in the forenoon, and when evening fell were heading towards Wilson's Promontory, the most southerly point of the Australian mainland. At noon the day following we passed through Port Philip Heads, and at four o'clock found ourselves slowly navigating the odoriferous Yarra-Yarra, finally berthing alongside at six o'clock in the evening, having made the passage in fifty-two hours.

Immediately after we were moored some hundreds of people stormed the gangway from the wharf, to the great annoyance of the officers and stewards.

"What do you people mean by coming here so

soon?" I heard the second officer cry to the crowd of incomers.

"Soon, do you call it?" roared a fiery Victorian. "If it weren't that we're a British push, we'd tar and feather both you and your shore agents."

"What — what's wrong?" gasped the startled officer, backing away.

"Oh, nothing!" responded the first speaker, jumping from the midst of the surging mob over the gunwale on to the deck. "But just listen to this." He unfolded a copy of the *Argus* and read: "Notice to passengers. The — Co.'s new swift steamer *Woolloomoolloo* will sail for Adelaide and Albany, and other Westralian ports, at 10 A.M. to-day. Passengers are requested to be on board at least one hour before sailing-time."

"What's the riot about?" enquired the captain, suddenly appearing.

"The usual thing, sir," answered the officer. "We've been billed to sail at ten this morning; it's 6.30 P.M. now, and look at all that cargo to go aboard."

"Well, well," laughed the captain, "the worry is mine, not yours. We can go on loading with the electric light, and meanwhile, I see there is a sailing-notice posted on the shed door over there, just you go and ink that A.M. into a P.M."

The officer pushed his way down the gangway to obey the captain's order, and desirous of having a look through Melbourne, Mr Woodhouse, Mr Greenhead, and five others, including myself, made our way to the lower deck and jumped over the gunwale on to the wharf. It was raining—it often is in Melbourne—and the roads from the docks to the

cable-car in Flinders Street were knee-deep in mud. It was also very dark, which fact did not add to our comfort. However, once in the city our spirits revived, and after taking a turn round Swanston, Bourke, Elizabeth, and Collins streets, and a tour of inspection through Cole's book arcade, some one proposed that we should go to the theatre. This proposition was at once agreed to, and presently we were seated in the "Princess," deeply interested in the doings of some very stupid but virtuous people alleged on the play-bills to be "Alone in London."

"Dear me!" ejaculated Mr Woodhouse some time about the middle of the performance, "it's ten o'clock. This is very interesting, but we'll lose the boat if we stay longer."

"Hush!" said Mr Greenhead in an impressive whisper, "sit still, and trust to me."

"Has you got the key of the *Woolloomoolloo* in your pocket?" queried Ted Anson, the gentleman who had experimented with the steering-gear.

"Yes," came the answer in the same Sherlock-Holmes voice; "look there!" He pointed to the dress-circle as he spoke, and each in turn sighting his gaze along the outstretched arm as if it were a rifle-barrel, we saw the captain of the *Woolloomoolloo* in gorgeous uniform sitting with a lady companion.

"Hallo, skipper!" shouted Ted, standing up. "Doesn't ye think it's about time we was gettin' the old *W.* floatin' again; it's past ten, you know."

The skipper turned and glared.

"Put him out! Order!" roared the audience; and the villain, who was just delivering his most cynical speech, paused till the uproar died away.

"Yes, I says throw him out," continued Ted, in

the belief that the remarks were applied to the gentleman on the stage. His back-block comrades murmuring their approval of his words, he went on : "Lor' ! if I were that other silly goody-goody chap, I would have spiffed the black-whiskered fellow long ago." But the "Princess" is the finest theatre in the Southern Hemisphere, at least it claims to be. Melbourne likewise claims to be the finest city south of the line, and its present people do not like bushmen, unless at a distance, so when the ensuing riot was quelled we were outside the theatre, as were also about half a dozen wounded officials. For various reasons we hurried down to the steamer and sought our respective cabins. I noticed when passing through the loading-sheds that the sailing-bill again read A.M., but finding no mention of any date, I concluded from the amount of cargo lying around that it referred to some forenoon of the next week. I was wrong, however, for the following day at noon the hatches were closed down, and our gallant steamer moved down the river.

I took an early opportunity of marching the four back-blockers up to the captain to apologize for the annoyance they had caused him in the theatre.

"Skipper," said Tim Wyatt, "we is only darned ignorant, 'way-back' fellows goin' over to W.A. to grope for nuggets, an' we didn't mean no offence last night."

"Of course not," replied the captain, laughing. "You fellows never do."

"An' we didn't know the lady was with you. I tell you we is darned bad about it now."

"We is," chorused the others, fighting among themselves for the possession of the captain's navi-

gating instruments, which were lying promiscuously around his cabin.

"Say no more about it then, men," said the captain, "and we'll call it square——"

"Hadn't we better go out on deck?" I interrupted, noting with alarm the interest the worthies were beginning to display in the mechanism of a sextant, and the gallant commander, seeing the cause of my apprehension, at once led the way.

"Dear me!" remarked Mr Woodhouse, as we stepped out on the bridge-deck. "Here we are at Queenscliff already. We took an hour longer to do the inward journey."

"Yes; the chief engineer wants to get into Port Adelaide in time for Church on Sunday," said the captain. "And in fact that's why I'm taking the short cut through the Heads, as you see. The worst of it is there is a sand-bar right across the 'Rip' in this channel, and if the old *W.* is heavy in the stern we'll stick on it."

"It is pleasant to know that the water is not very deep here," observed Mr Greenhead.

"Is it?" said the captain, looking closely at the last speaker. "I am not quite of that opinion."

"There's the bar now," I cried, and at the same moment the officer on the bridge tugged violently at the engine-room telegraph and shouted something to the steersman. The captain lit a cigar and leaned over the rail to watch our progress.

"I'll bet you a fiver we'll get over it," he said to me.

"What will happen if we don't?" enquired Mr Woodhouse anxiously.

"I'll lose my ticket," answered the captain laconically.

“But we——”

“Oh, you! Your friends can draw your insurance money. But excuse me, I am wanted on the bridge.”

The *Woolloomoolloo* had now almost stopped, and the surge from the propeller was racing away from her stern like the rapids of a British Columbian river. Suddenly she listed to port, and her hull vibrated with the mighty strokes of the piston, but still I felt she was slipping forward.

“Can’t you give her any more, Mac?” sang out the captain, as the chief engineer came out to watch events. “She’s almost clear now, forward.”

“We’ll flee ow’r directly if no’,” answered Mac grimly, “for I’ve been keeping off the pumps this last while back so as to get plenty o’ dry steam, and the bilers are gey weel empty noo.”

At this point the *Woolloomoolloo* stopped dead, and from the convulsive shudder which ran through her frame I knew she was smelling the ground rather aggressively.

“Open her up! Stand by the throttle, Mac-tavish,” cried the chief engineer to his compatriot on duty. “If steam’ll put the old tub through she’ll gang——”

“The water’s oot o’ sight in the gauge-glasses,” floated a warning voice from the region of crankshafts and piston-rods; and, shouting to the captain that he could only “gie four minutes afore startin’ the pumps,” the chief rushed below.

“Here, boys, I moves we gets out an’ pushes,” proposd Ted Anson. “We owe that much to the poor old skipper——”

“For Heaven’s sake hold on to these bushmen,” yelled the captain to me; and I hastily explained to

the impulsive Ted and his friends that they had much better remain on deck.

"Men, be cool; remember you are Britons," cried Mr Greenhead, addressing the steerage passengers who were congregated beneath us on the forward hatch, indulging in extremely interesting speculations as to the probable direction of our future movements, and making some very concise remarks concerning the effect of the law of gravitation upon such. For a moment the fate of the *Woolloomoolloo* trembled in the balance. The engines groaned, rattled, and hissed, and the propeller lashed and thrashed the water into a thick yellow scum. Suddenly the jarring grind ceased, and our ship shot forward into the Southern Ocean. We had crossed the Port Phillip bar, or "Rip," by the short cut.

Father Neptune was still kindly disposed towards us, and we made good time throughout the night and during the next day, which was Saturday, negotiating the "Back Stairs passage" between Kangaroo Island and the mainland on Sunday morning at three o'clock. We passed the *Semaphore* at eight, and two hours later safely berthed up the river.

The first thing that met our eyes on the wharf was the old shipping-bill warning passengers that the — Co's new swift steamer *Woolloomoolloo* would sail, etc., at noon, but as we had grown familiar with that piece of fiction, we disregarded it, and went on shore for a look round.

Adelaide is known to all Australians as the Holy City, and of a Sunday it is certainly more inhospitable than any Scotch town. Port Adelaide, however, is different, and I have no doubt those of the

passengers who confined their peregrinations to the Port found much to amuse themselves, although it was quite a little time before some became used to the trains running through the main streets. Locating the station about a hundred boarded a convenient train and went up to Adelaide city, ten miles distant, there splitting into smaller parties to see the sights and to escape attracting too much attention, for the people of the Holy City (!) easily know strangers, and, it is said, not always to the advantage of the latter. The church bells had a strange effect upon some of my friends, and, doubtless, feeling grateful for so far having escaped the dangers of the deep, Mr Greenhead expressed the opinion that it was very fitting we should go to church. I did not at first fall in with this idea, but all now being in a semi-religious turn of mind, I cautioned a few of the irrepressible back-blockers as to their behaviour, and led them into an imposing structure in North Rundle Street. But my friends were determined to show they could act correctly when they felt inclined, and beyond shocking the good worshippers at the close of the service by audibly giving it as their opinion that "it was as good as a circus," and throwing some money to the organist as indicating their approval of his performance, the "way-back" men did nothing to disgrace their more staid companions. Finding Rundle and King William Streets rather dull after this, and having given all their ready cash to some Salvation Army bands, my friends proposed returning to the steamer, but on our arrival at the station we found we had just missed the train, and that there would not be another until five in the evening.

However much Adelaide may be a strict observer of the seventh day, the Port is not, and its workers have different opinions to those in the city (they receive double pay for Sunday labour), and when we reached the *Woolloomoolloo* the hatches were closed and the decks covered with cases of fruit for the Westralian gold-fields, among which two boilers and fittings for Kargoorlie also found space. Surprised at this unusual despatch, we hurried on board just as the moorings were cast off, and on going to my cabin, which was shared by Bourke Bill, one of the back-blockers, I found it occupied by two strangers and their luggage.

"Excuse me," said one as I entered, "this is our cabin."

"Excuse me," I returned, "but I was under the impression it was mine."

"Excuse me," broke in Bill, who had followed me, "I is no hand at arguing, but will you go out by the door there or through the darned port-hole?"

"Sir," exclaimed one of the intruders, "I am a B.A. of Melbourne."

"And I is a B.B., which means Bad Bill, of Bourke. Is ye ready?"

A crowd had now collected at the cabin-door, and from the shouts that arose farther along the passage it was evident that some of our friends had also found intruders in their cabins.

"Where is the purser, steward?" cried the B.A. angrily.

"There is no purser on this ship," I remarked.

"Oh yes, there is!" said a youthful Australian from the audience. "He joined the ship at Adelaide, and he is a son of the chief director of the company."

"Trot him out, then," cried Bill.

"I'm him," responded the youth affably. "No, you needn't get your backs up. When I heard you fellows had gone up to Adelaide I felt sure you would lose the boat, so I gave your cabins to some others who booked from this port. You can't sleep four men in a two-berth cabin, I suppose?"

"Not likely," said the B.A. indignantly. "I paid ten pounds for my berth, and I'll have it."

"And we paid twelve pounds for ours," roared Bill, "and we'll have them."

"You can't fight it out among you?" suggested the purser. "I would see fair-play."

"Well, without meaning any offence to the other gentleman, if that is the rule on a coaster, I am sure I don't mind," said the second stranger. This gentleman had not spoken before, but he now discarded his coat and signified to Bill that he was ready for the fray.

"But I will not agree to that method of settling our claims," cried the B.A. "This is outrageous! Where's the captain?" He rushed out and disappeared down the passage; but the sounds of strife which now arose in that direction showed that war had been amicably agreed upon to settle the ownership of our comrades' cabins.

"What's causing the disturbance now?" cried the captain, returning with the Bachelor of Arts.

"Oh, they're complaining about their accommodation, sir," airily replied the purser.

"But this is one of the cabins of the Sydney passengers," said the captain, recognizing me.

"I know, but I thought we would have got clear of the port before the five train came in from Adelaide.

A lot of the passengers went up to the city, you know, so, making sure they would miss the boat, I gave their cabins away."

"But why can't you give the Adelaide people the cabins reserved for them?" cried the captain.

"Well, you see, I've been waiting for some one to ask for better accommodation, and then I could engineer a deal with them; but it seems to me it's all new chums we've got this trip, and I question if they could raise a five-pound note among them."

What the captain said need not be repeated, and sadly the budding financier turned away. Before the doors of the other cabins sat the men who had been ejected from the various apartments during the dispute, but I noticed that all my back-block friends had contrived to be among the victors. The losers were all of a philosophical disposition, however, and sympathized with each other over their misfortune, until the steward went round and made matters right again by giving the South Australians their rightful berths on the other side of the ship.

We were now clear of the "drain," as the chief officer termed the river, and after another fight for the best positions at the dinner-table, all settled down to make the best of circumstances, and generally to become agreeable. It should here be said, that of the two hundred passengers who joined the ship at Port Adelaide, more than half came from Melbourne and Sydney, having travelled overland to reduce their time at sea as much as possible. Among these latter were two theatrical companies bound for the gold-fields, who, of course, were deadly rivals. A close scrutiny of the passenger-list also revealed that we had ten parsons on board; four members of the

Westralian Legislative Council, three doctors, fifteen mine managers, and four bankers.

Three gentlemen openly avowed themselves as "card specialists," and six added the information after their names that they were millionaires. Back-blockers going over to the golden West to make their fortunes, and returning gold-miners comprised the majority of the remainder, while of the hundred ladies on board, ninety apparently were prima donnas.

The lights of the *Semaphore* were twinkling far astern when the passengers began their after-dinner promenade on the poop deck. The sea was like a huge pond, on the surface of which the lights from our port-holes cast eerie shadows. Away on our left the precipitous sides of Kangaroo Island merged into the darkness of night, and on our starboard the incoming German male-steamer *Barbarossa* raced past ablaze with electric light. I was surprised that we had been so favoured by the elements, but the unnatural stillness of the atmosphere suggested that something of a different nature might be preparing for us. I was talking with the chief officer as to this when a mixed party standing near the companion way began singing "The Holy City," and in less than two minutes every able-bodied passenger had gathered round them to assist in the chorus. A little German was gesticulating wildly in the centre of the group of singers, but on seeing the manner in which his choir was augmented, he ordered a halt with his baton and cried :

"Will all ze ladies dat sing ze condralto kindly come to dis side. Ze gentlemen will please sort demselves into tenor and bass, and all ze rest can sing sobrano." The arrangement was speedily carried

out to his satisfaction, again he gave the starting signal, and the popular air swelled over the ocean in thunderous volume, but nevertheless in true and pleasant harmony. "Ora Pro Nobis" was next rendered in fine style, and then followed "The Lost Chord" and some other hymns. But the taste of the musicians soon changed. The piano was dragged on deck from the music-room, and "Poor Old Joe," "Sons of the Sea," "Auld Lang Syne," and "Britannia Rules the Waves," each for a time received some attention. In the midst of this latter patriotic chorus the leader stopped suddenly, and thinking probably that this was because his German blood cried out against singing the praise of the "best-hated nation," some Melbourneites stepped forward to use gentle persuasion. Just at that moment the *Woolloomoolloo's* stern rose gently, subsiding again with a greasy, sliding motion very unpleasant, and the Victorians stopped and seemed rather thoughtfully inclined. I looked skyward, and the swiftly-scudding clouds and fast-disappearing stars showed that Clement Wragge, Esq., Australia's own meteorologist, had prepared some weather for our benefit.

"Rule Britannia—Britannia—rules—the waves," shouted some one in a commendable endeavour to restore life to the party; but as he had to pause at the last word and run to the side to hold communion with the vasty deep, the effect was lost. For a moment the sons of the great Austral Land fought for their vaunted supremacy over the billows. But Nature joined the enemy, and when next the gallant ship drove her bows into a head-sea, her rear part rose correspondingly on the same swell, and the

propeller, clearing the water, revolved with fiendish rapidity, causing the steel hull to shiver until it vibrated like a stringed musical instrument. When the stern fell again, it went down with such a sickening oily squelch that, I suppose, the digestive organs of the singers revolted. At any rate, after sundry mysterious performances, the majority went below, and, a heavy shower of rain accompanying the next upheaval of the vessel, the others followed. When I reached the main saloon there were not more than a dozen people in evidence at first, but closer observation revealed that the long cushioned forms round the room were all occupied by men and women, who, to all appearance, had no further interest in life.

"Say, sir, do you play chess?" cried the purser agonizedly, appearing beside me with a chess-board.

"Not in the meantime," I replied, sitting down at a side-table. "It takes too much time. Get some other victim for your skill."

"Draughts, then?" he continued, ignoring my advice.

"Why, what's the matter with you?" I exclaimed. "You are not——"

"Yes, I am. Look here, I can't play worth a twopenny cigar, and I'll shout for the ship every game you win," the youthful official cried, and noting that his face was rapidly assuming a bilious colour, I consented, and frantically he began to arrange the men, which, of course, were fitted with pins for fastening in the squares. He opened the game, and, by a reckless forcing of the play fatal to his chances of winning, contrived to get the board cleared of half the men in about two minutes. "To

get room to think," he said apologetically ; " but now we'll play." Having said this, he bent forward and studied the board so intently, and with such a profound look of wisdom in his eyes, that I expected him to make some startling move ; but he took such a long time thinking over it, that I ceased speculating on what it might be, and turned round to see what had become of Mr Greenhead and Mr Woodhouse, and my back-block friends. They were huddled together under a table, but words failed them when they nobly tried to answer my call.

" There's a buster coming up from the south-west," said an officer, entering the saloon. " You'd better anchor your false teeth to-night, for we'll get a proper shaking up when we leave the lee of Kangaroo Island."

" We're getting that now," said some one, and as the *Woolloomoolloo* was doing her best to tie herself into a knot at that moment, there was reason for his observation.

" I say, hadn't you better move?" spoke the leading gentleman of one of the theatrical companies to my opponent ; and I then became aware that all the mobile members of the passengers were watching our game, and that the purser was still lost in the depths of his thoughts.

" O officer, do please tell me, is there any danger of the ship sinking?" cried a Sydney lady, from the form behind the long starboard table.

" No, ma'am, not the slightest," cried the officer. " So long as the old craft keeps pitching, life is a long way safer on board her than in George Street at Redfern Station crossing. So long as she doesn't go in for rolling you needn't fear."

"What is special about her rolls?" enquired one of the gentlemen who had disputed our claim to our cabin.

"Oh, she is dead on rolling. You see, I knew her well before the present owners bought her; she used to be the — of the S— Line, and she rolled right over once in the China Sea——"

"What!" yelled half a hundred passengers, from various positions round the saloon.

"Don't worry," answered the cool official. "She is not rolling now, and anyhow, we've got rolling-chocks fitted on since then."

"How many—er—what was the damage done when she rolled over?" asked a quiet-looking old gentleman.

"Oh, ten niggers, two engineers, four Portuguese stewards, and some passengers——"

"And some passengers?"

"Yes; half a dozen or so, but they were Chinese mandarins or something, and not worth counting. Anyhow, that's why this steamer happens to be in the Australian trade. She was sold cheap, you know." As this frank statement was concluded the ship lurched suddenly to port, and the draught-board and men fell off the table.

"Here, officer," cried one solemn-faced person, "that was a bit of a roll just now, was it not? Oh, here she comes again! Excuse me."

He rushed away, and the *Woolloomoolloo* slowly and deliberately rolled over until the floor assumed an angle of nearly forty-five degrees, and the people lying on the starboard seats fell off.

"O Lord!" groaned a man near me, struggling to regain his former position, "why did I ever come to sea?"

"Keep on your back and you'll be all right," I advised, holding on to the table while the vessel hung undecided whether it should come back to even keel or topple right over.

The purser was now stretched under the table, supremely indifferent to everything. He had made a brave attempt to fight the sea by concentrating his attention on the game, but the ruthless scattering of the men had robbed him of his only chance of successfully doing so. But the *Woolloomoolloo* now came back with a rush, and swung so far the other way that the sleepers on the port side were in turn thrown from their perches, and a pile of crockery in the pantry obeyed the law of gravitation and was smashed into fragments. Next moment there was a loud grinding noise on deck overhead, followed immediately by a smash and a series of hoarse shouts, and the officer hurriedly made his exit.

"We are sinking! We have been run into!" screamed a lady hysterically.

"Well, you needn't think you've got the fun all to yourself," groaned some one from the floor.

"I'll bet any one five to three we'll all be drowned in ten minutes," cheerfully cried a sportive gold-miner.

"Will any of you gentlemen lend a hand on deck?" spoke the second officer, re-entering the saloon. "Those boilers for the Kalgoorlie mines have broken adrift and are rolling about with the ship; they are playing the devil with the other deck cargo."

Without comment eight men followed him, and after an hour's battling, during which three members of the crew were damaged severely, we managed to

secure the huge drums with heavy chains ; but long before this all the cases of fruit had been swept overboard. When our services were no longer absolutely necessary we turned in, though sleep was impossible. All through the night the *Woolloomoolloo* tossed and rolled and shook. At times a monster sea would break over the deck, and from the peculiar wrenching, crunching sound which sometimes accompanied this occurrence, I knew that another boat or a piece of the rail had been carried away. Occasionally the engines would almost stop, then, the propeller rising out of the water, they would race away at terrific speed, until checked at the throttle-valve by the engineer on duty, or braked hard down by the water again. When drizzly morning came, only six passengers turned out on the wet deck, and of these only four went down to breakfast. We sat together at one table, and gave each other brief but wonderfully detailed sketches of former sea experiences. One of the survivors was a returning gold-miner ; a second was Mr Harry Thornton, the leading man of one of the dramatic companies we had on board ; the third was a Mr Palmer, the friend of the B.A., and the new science master of a noted Perth academy ; and the fourth was the writer of this faithful narrative.

“We are not travelling very fast, Mr Macillwraith?” I ventured, turning to the chief engineer, who, with the captain, had joined our little party.

“No ; she’s only makin’ sixty revolutions, an’ she’s slippin’ ten oot o’ every thirteen feet she screws,” responded the engineer. “If this weather lasts, I doot there will be a famine on board afore we get into Albany.”

"I hardly see how that could be if only four passengers turn out to meals," I said. "But I hope we'll get into Fremantle in time to connect with the *Karrakatta*?"

The Scot shook his head, and the captain gave it as his opinion that we might—if the *Woolloomoolloo* went overland, or developed wings.

"If you were in a hurry, why didn't you walk?" enquired the gold-miner.

"Or take the home mail-steamer?" said the science master.

"I wish we had done that," said the actor ruefully. "We might have got ahead of Dunn's company by doing so, but now we'll have to fall in second, as usual."

"Nary, me boy," exclaimed the digger, "your plan is to let the other fellows keep Perth to themselves. You leave this boat at Albany an' rail right up to Kalgoorlie; there's a darned sight more money there than down in Perth, an' the people are not so miserly over it neither. I'll give you a note to the mayor. He used to be my mate on the White Feather deep alluvial; he'll fix ye all right, I reckon."

"On behalf of the company I thank you for your kindly advice," replied Mr Thornton. "But, unfortunately, our funds are in such a state that we—er—that is—we intend to work the road up to the gold-fields——" He paused, and clutched at the table while the ship performed some geometrical evolutions, and after these had been successfully accomplished the captain said:

"I was thinking, Mr Thornton, that your company might give a show of some sort in the saloon when

the weather settles ; we could rig up a stage behind the pantry."

"Certainly. We should like to do something to amuse the——"

"Amusement be ——," began the captain, but his engineer-in-chief's horror-stricken countenance checked him, and he lamely finished his sentence with "jiggered" and said no more.

But it was enough, and the entertainment was arranged for the first day the elements were favourable. At noon I noticed that the chart hung up in the companion way indicated that we had travelled one hundred and eighty miles since leaving Port Adelaide. This caused me to marvel greatly, for I had expected to find, as the second engineer had confided to me, that we "were going ahead by the stern."

The days passed, and although the sea continued to behave as it usually does in the Bight, the passengers gradually became accustomed to the motion of the ship, and proceeded to enjoy themselves. The dramatic entertainment was a great success, and, notwithstanding that the members of Dunn's company "straight from London" did their best to interrupt the performance, until the back-blockers bundled them all out on deck, a sum of forty-five pounds was voluntarily subscribed by the audience to enable the half-stranded company to travel straight to the gold-fields.

"Captain," I said, on the sixth day out from Adelaide, "I thought Albany was a substantial town built on the shores of King George's Sounds?"

"Why, yes," the skipper answered surprisedly.

"It is a fairly substantial city for Westralia. But what are you driving at?"

"Albany, I hope; but I am afraid we have missed it. According to the Government chart that port is one thousand and twenty miles due west of Adelaide. We have now sailed, according to our chart, twelve hundred and forty miles on that course, so, if it has not removed during the storm——"

"Easy there; don't speak so loud," grinned the skipper. "You must remember that this ship has got a reputation to keep up, and if she can't do it herself, and old Mac and his kettles can't make her, why, I must do it myself. That chart there is only for the passengers' benefit. We have got a hundred and fifteen miles to go yet before we reach port, and then, after we dump our passengers ashore, I'll lift out a couple of days or thereabouts without any one being the wiser."

"But every one can count the days since leaving Adelaide."

"Never you mind that. They'll forget everything once on shore. And, anyhow, you're not paid to explain things. The fact is—in confidence, of course—I have another chart, the real one, in my cabin. By the way, Captain Lawrence of the *Nemesis* is a great friend of mine, and he will be sailing up the coast to Broome or Derby the day after we get into Fremantle."

"How very interesting!" I said. "But I sail with the *Karrakatta*."

"I don't think so. You see, you'll just miss it by two days, and as there won't be another regular boat for a fortnight, I thought you might be glad to get clear in the *Nemesis*—it will be cheaper."

"I understand, Captain," I said, laughing, "and I thank you. Our agreement is, that I am to say nothing about coasters while in Australia, and in return you are to use your influence to get me out of the country on a cargo tramp?"

"Exactly. It's a fair and square bargain that hurts nobody. Of course you can say what you like when north of the Line. But, excuse me, the Third's calling." The captain left me and went on the bridge, and next morning at daylight we drifted alongside the jetty at Albany.

Albany is a beautiful town, nestling on the slopes of some hills rising from the shores of its magnificent harbour. It is the centre of a great timber district, but owes its existence chiefly to the holiday-seeking gold-miner from Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie. There are some good hotels and restaurants and a great many shops in the town, but they are frequently closed unless a steamer happens to be in port.

Most of my fellow-travellers left the ship here to proceed by rail to their various destinations, but having already lost the *Karrakatta*, I had no inducement to leave my comfortable quarters on the *Woolloomoollo*, and so, with the back-blockers and some others, remained on board while she, two days afterwards, made her way round the dreaded Cape Leeuwin. We had some cargo in the forward hold for Bunbury, but the captain said he was not going to lose a day over it, and would land it coming back. We therefore passed this pleasure-city of the west, and next day sailed into Fremantle, where the *Woolloomoolloo's* voyage terminated, exactly four days behind the time she was advertised to start for the east again.

Fremantle is practically the port for West Australia. It is built on the banks of the River Swan. It is a town of about ten thousand inhabitants, and is somewhat English in appearance. While my friends waited on a train for Perth, the capital, on the morning of our arrival, I paid a visit to a tonsorial artist for the purpose of removing some effects of my sojourn on the *Woolloomoolloo*. The artist in question was a typical sand-groper or Westralian, and took some trouble to inform me of that fact.

"Yous wouldn't think that I was an M.L.C., would you?" he said, in course of his operations.

"No," I replied. "To speak candidly, you do not look like a respected member of any legislative council. Are you really one?"

"You bet ; a lifer, too——"

"A what?"

"A lifer ; no cheap mutton 'bout me. Old Smith over in South Aus. offered to pay a hundred thou. to the British Government if they would let him take a trip home. But, Lor' ! I wouldn't go home for that money even though they'd let me."

"I'm afraid I hardly understand you. Who would prevent you going home?"

"Lor' ! didn't I tell you ? I is an M.L.C."

"Oh, I suppose your duties require your constant presence, then?"

"Duties be hanged !" roared the Westralian. "The Gov. likes me so much that they can't live without me being here. M.L.C. means—mustn't—leave—the colony. Now, does ye understand?"

"Perfectly. I forgot I was in W.A. ; but why mustn't you leave the colony?"

"'Cause I is doin' time—but there, I'd better tell

you the story. When I was younger than I is now I was cook on the pearling-schooner *Maggie Wentworth*. The mate an' me didn't get along very sweet, an' both he an' the captain complained so much 'bout their tucker that I didn't know what to do. So one day I served his head—the mate's, I mean—for dinner; of course I killed him first. I suppose I must have had a touch of the sun or something."

"Undoubtedly; but—I think I'll postpone shaving to-day, I—I——"

"Lor'! ye is skeered; an' one side shaved, too. Lor'!—— Here, Sammy, finish shaving this gentleman, he's squeamish with my story; 'spects I'll cut his throat, likely."

"You needn't worry," said the assistant, coming forward. "Some of the best people here are M.L.C.'s, an' none of them have done half as much good as poor Dandy there."

I did not enter into an argument on the merits of Dandy's case, but I felt as if taking a new lease of life when I got out to the dirty street again, and, joining my friends at the railway station, we all proceeded to Perth, twelve miles distant.

There are some pretty suburbs between the coast and the capital, notably Claremont, Cottesloe, Karrakatta, and Subiaco, and Perth itself is one of the most progressive cities of the British Empire. It is also one of the most wicked and most religious—but perhaps the less said on either of these subjects the better. It has some resemblance to Perth in Scotland, its position on the Swan being very similar to that of the Fair City on the Tay. It is a city of fine buildings, doubtful hotels, and, I should say, forty thousand people, most of whom seem to be Govern-

ment officials of some kind; those who are not being made up of miners from the fields for a spell, Cook's tourists, and Jew second-hand dealers. There are also various institutions, which apparently exist solely for the purpose of relieving men of superfluous cash. I had much difficulty in keeping my comrades under restraint while walking along Hay Street, the sight of policemen affording great amusement to the back-blockers.

"Darned funny-lookin' trooper that is," said one, who answered to the cognomen of "Nuggety." "I wonder how much it would cost to have a set to with him!"

"You'd better content yourself with Bill or Ted if you are inclined that way," I advised. "It will be cheaper, at any rate." But as Bill and Ted also seemed desirous of having some fun, the more sedate members of our party laid hands on the back-blockers and forcibly restrained their ardour until all danger, *i.e.*—the policeman—was past.

That night we had a farewell supper in the Royal Hotel, and enjoyed ourselves greatly until, in the midst of a lengthy but eloquent discourse by Mr Greenhead, a steward from the *Woolloomoolloo* rushed into the room and shouted my name.

"Come away at once," he cried. "The old man is hunting all over the town for you, and the *Nemesis* is clearing out now. Captain Lawrence will lie off the long jetty until you come, and our skipper told me to tell you, if I got you before him, that your luggage is aboard already."

A hasty hand-grip all round and I was off; but before I reached the station I was overtaken by Mr Woodhouse, Mr Greenhead, Bill, Ted, and Nuggety,

who, despite my warning that they would not get a train back that night, insisted on accompanying me down to Fremantle. An hour and a half later, standing on the after-deck of the *Nemesis*, I saw the light on Rottnest Island looming brightly on our port bow.

The Great Land of Gold

BISECTED by meridian 119° E., and lying between parallels 25° and 26° S., is a tract of land which claims to be the heart of the great West Australian Eldorado. This country is known as Peak Hill. Its claim to distinction is based upon its phenomenal gold yield, but its geographical position might also warrant its assumed title. At best, Peak Hill is but a waterless desert, unfit for human habitation; but Nature, in her usual sarcastic mood, has lavished such a golden treasure thereon that few can resist its allurements. A township bearing the name of the district has sprung up where the gold was first discovered, and its presence bears testimony to the heroic endurance and grim perseverance of the sons of Greater Britain, and proves that where gold abounds man will also find an abiding place.

We—my comrade and I—were making for this city of gold. We had cycled from Kalgoorlie, the chief town of the southern gold-fields, and were now driving along a hard camel-pad leading over the Robinson Ranges. We had not tasted food, other than a few raisins, since leaving Nannine, about one hundred and ten miles back, and consequently were not very energetic in our movements. For

two hours we toiled upwards under a sun that blistered the skin wherever exposed to it, now following our winding path through clumps of shadeless mulga, now threading an erratic course amidst surface outcrops of huge iron-stone boulders, which glowed and sparkled with a dull phosphorescence in the intense sunlight, but which we were very careful not to touch.

"I doot we've lost the road," at length exclaimed Mac, as we approached, in single file, what appeared to be the summit.

"No fear of that," I answered. "We passed two bottles and an empty beef-tin about a mile back. But look! there's the town in the valley."

Dismounting, we gazed in silent admiration at the scene before us. We stood on the crest of the ridge we had been crossing, and beneath us, about a mile away, the white-painted roofs of Peak Hill glittered in the quivering sunlight like the domes of an Oriental city, while, dotted here and there, some white spots shining through a mulga patch indicated the presence of tents. The town stood in a hollow, and around it the scrub-covered slopes rose to the level at which we stood, and far on the northern horizon, just discernible through the indescribable cloud-haze of the desert, a smooth, round cone reared itself above the surrounding country.

"If that is the peak from which this place takes its name, it seems a good distance off," I remarked, noting now for the first time the heavy, rumbling sounds that bespoke the near presence of ore-crushing batteries.

Mac paid no attention to my observation. "I'm hungry enough to eat a nigger," was all his comment,



DRY-BLOWING FOR GOLD, KALGOORLIE, WEST AUSTRALIA

and, mounting our steeds, we sped down the white track towards the town.

While still half a mile distant we passed a row of tents, the occupants of which seemed somewhat excited, but, being on a down grade, we could not readily stop, although one man requested us to do so in words emphatically Australian. We were now among the workings, which stretched all round the town, and as we flashed past the dumps and windlasses, the scantily-clad miners turned and stared at us, while one individual, engaged in separating sand from gold in a contrivance known as a dry-blower, seized an axe and ran after us. Suddenly a cyclist shot out from a hut in front and flew down the road at a terrific pace without once looking round, and next minute we found ourselves in a crowd of shouting men, who had swarmed from shafts on every side. "It's the Six Mile, mates," I heard one say as we left them behind, and then we entered the town.

"Say, mates, what's the racket?" "Where is it?" "Who struck it?" several men cried, running alongside us as we looked up and down for the least pretentious hotel.

"It is a rush to the Six Mile, I believe," I replied, "but that is all I know." It evidently was sufficient, for the men at once started running, and in less than a minute disappeared round the corner of a saloon bearing the name M——S BONANZA.

"How much for your jiggers?" cried the saloon owner, rushing out and frantically seizing Mac's machine. "Look alive!" he continued, my companion meanwhile staring at him in wonderment. "Twenty? thirty? forty? D—— ye!" I am not sure whether his last remark was prompted by the

enforced removal of his grasp from Mac's machine or by our unceremonious departure without any attempt at trade, but it was evident that if he thought a much-abused cycle worth forty pounds, it was of even more value to us. The entire population seemed to be taking part in the rush, and a more heterogeneous band it would be hard to imagine. Some were riding on half-starved horses, some had bicycles, and some were establishing new sprinting records; a few overdressed individuals, whom I rightly judged to be mine managers, were driving in buggies; at least four men were perched upon camels, and a bullock-team had also got into the medley. Every man was armed with the implement that previous experience told him was the most useful for claim-pegging; in most cases this was an axe or a pick, but about fifty had only pieces of rough wood, and, judging from the eagerness with which the others appropriated any scrub stumps lying in their path, these seemed very desirable adjuncts. Falling in behind a bronzed, half-naked, six-foot-six specimen of humanity on a bicycle, we skirted the edge of the crowd and struck off at a tangent into the bush. Our leader evidently knew his business, and after Mac had demonstrated that however convenient his long limbs might be in a foot-race, we were his superiors on bicycles, he became friendly, told us his name was Harry Abbots, and asked if we had seen the Six Mile slug.

"No," I answered. "What is its weight?"

"Forty-two ounces an' five weights" (penny-weights), he shouted over his shoulder. "It were Old Macnamara that found it, jest 'bout three inches from the surface."

We could still hear the timber crackling away to our left, and the various exclamations that arose

showed that the main body of men had encountered some obstacle to their progress. Our companion almost fell from his machine in sheer delight when he heard the significant expressions. "It's the Five Mile sand-patch," he chuckled. "No man can go through it in less——" He ran against an unoffending gidgya-tree while speaking, and the spokes fell in a shower from his front wheel. His long legs proved of much service to him, for as his machine dropped under him he simply spread out his feet and stood safely on the sand.

"Them Australians wad mak' the mate o' an Anchor Liner commit suicide," Mac muttered reflectively, as we left Abbots declaiming fervently, and steered for the open country which we could now see straight ahead. Usually the barren tracts are covered with soft impassable drift-sand, but the surface of this one was fairly hard where we crossed it, and five minutes later we entered the timber-clump again and dismounted at a tent.

"You're first, boys," called out a miner from the inside. "We're the prospectors of the Six Mile; come in and celebrate."

"Wait till we stake off a claim," I replied; "the rush will be here directly. Can you lend us an axe?"

"What! new chums?" exclaimed the voice inside. "Well, I'll be——"

"Hung, maybe," suggested Mac impatiently, "if you don't look alive with that axe."

"You darned fool, don't you see that claim pegged out there? Don't you know that Old Macnamara and his mate always pegs out a claim for the first of every rush they starts. Now, will you come and celebrate?"

"We will," we both responded with alacrity; and we did.

Before evening the ground was staked off by the rush for about a mile along the supposed line of reef. Finding we had some time to spare, and feeling indebted to poor Abbots for our luck, we pegged out a claim for him next our own, and his surprise may be imagined when, arriving on foot, he found it ready for him.

"You're the two whitest men I knows," he said, "an' may I be turned into a nigger if I ever goes back on you."

It was now late, and as the troopers were on the field to prevent "jumping," most of those who had been fortunate enough to obtain ground near the prospectors prepared their camp for the night, one man from each party going into the town for stores, and another to a windmill-driven pump, known as Tassy's, for water. Soon the field was as settled in appearance as though it had been an established camp for years, and as the stars came out and the camp-fires began to cast their flickering light among the dwarfed peach-, the mallee-, and the ubiquitous mulga-trees, the scene suggested dreamland.

"It has been quick work with us, Mac," I said, as we lit a fire on our own ground, intending to sleep off hunger. "I wonder how many of our neighbours would believe that our last meal was in the 'Star of the West' at Nannine?"

"I dinna ken, an' I dinna care," was Mac's answer; and next minute he was fast asleep. Abbots had disappeared at sundown, and, sitting alone in the sand, I felt very miserable. The fact that I could see men

eating and drinking as far down as the tenth claim did not tend to cheer me.

"I'm real sorry, Boss, for being so long," a familiar voice suddenly cried, and, turning round, I saw Abbots emerge from the shadows with a heavy water-bag in each hand and a well-packed provision-sack strapped across his shoulders.

"Why, Abbots, I thought you had gone home hours ago!" I said, as he unburdened himself.

"Home, mate, did you say? I has no home, bar my claim, anywhere; but I couldn't drive my darned long legs fast enough to git back sooner. D'ye like tea or coffee?"

"Either—or rather, what can be ready soonest."

"I reckon I'll borrow another billy an' we'll have both——"

"My mate, Old Macnamara, says tucker's ready; but you've got to bring your own knives an' forks," interrupted a voice from the darkness.

"You can tell Old Mac that we've got our own tucker, Irisher," answered Abbots; and before a reply could be given the branches crackled, and a stalwart trooper stood before us. "Sergeant Armstrong sends his compliments, and would like if you fellows that has the Scotch mate would come and dine with us—our camp is at the far end," he said; and I wondered vaguely if I was dreaming, for the change in our prospects within the last five minutes had been startling.

"Tell Armstrong he's jumping my claim, Boyd," cried Macnamara himself, coming forward. "I am the prospector of this show, and the new chums belong to me by right." A heated argument followed, in the midst of which Mac woke up; and seeing that Macnamara's party was the nearest, and had evidently

calculated on our company as a matter of course, we moved over to their fire, and the trooper departed sadly. Needless to say, we acquitted ourselves in a manner satisfactory, from our point of view at least ; but I fear Irisher, when he saw the last of his damper disappear, began figuring how long a forty-two ounce nugget would keep us in stores at Peak Hill prices.

After supper the miners gathered round our host's fire to hear the story of the find, and to get any information as to the line of reef and the nature of the auriferous deposit. "It is the strangest gold formation I have ever known, boys," said the grizzled veteran, "and I have prospected on every gold-field in the British empire. The reef, so far as I can make out, must be a feeder of the Great Belt, which runs northward from the Bight through the Kalgoorlie fields, and ends somewhere in the Indian Ocean."

"I wouldn't mind betting that you're wrong," said a quiet-looking man. "I say your nugget is more likely shed from a belt running east and west across Australia" ("What!" roared all who were capable of realizing the significance of the words), "and that belt passes right through under our feet ; and I shouldn't wonder if it crosses the Kalgoorlie belt somewhere between here and Horse-shoe Camp."

"Shure, Hamelin, an' can ye tell gold when ye see it?" said the Irishman maliciously.

"I think so ; at least I found about two hundred ounces of the stuff out in the Macdonald Ranges in South Australia, and—well—I traced this central belt from there west to the 128, and I should imagine that we've struck it here again."

The theory of the existence of a latitudinal belt was not a new one, but hitherto the evidence in its favour

had been almost entirely of an indirect nature, being based on the extremely vague calculations of so-called experts. The men were therefore very interested when told that surface indications of this gigantic reef had actually been seen as far out as the 128th degree, and when some of them remembered Hamelin as the mineralogist of a famous South Australian expedition, all doubt as to the reliability of the statement was set at rest.

"I'll not say that a man is not giving hard fact, just because he runs against me," remarked Macnamara, "but our forty-two-ounce slug is alluvial, and was found almost on the surface. Now, how do you account for that?"

"I can't account for it, unless by assuming that the lode was once on top," replied Hamelin.

"P'raps it came down with the iron-stone by mistake,"¹ suggested one of the miners.

"How d'ye know it didn't grow here?" enquired another.

"It doesn't make no difference, anyhow. I reckon this show will turn out a duffer," said a melancholy-visaged man.

"Lor'! Prophet, are ye at it again?" cried a powerful Tasmanian, skilfully directing a flaming log at the last speaker's head.

The Prophet adroitly evaded the missile, then, rising to his feet, he began: "Tassy Lawton, ye has insulted me, an' I'll now tell ye what will happen to ye for it." Here he paused, evidently waiting for inspiration, and Abbots, acting probably with the best intentions for the community at large, reached over about a yard

¹ Referring to the conjecture that the iron-stone pebbles on the surface of the Australian desert are meteorites.

and a half of one of his nether limbs, and by an ingenious movement precipitated the poor Prophet backwards on the sand.

"There ain't much good of being a prophet here," remarked the unfortunate, picking himself up. "But Lor'! boys, just wait till the fever an' the Barcoo rot starts among ye." Consoling himself with those pleasant anticipations, he resumed his seat in the circle and looked unutterable things.

"I hear the nigs are out up on the Gascoyne," said Trooper Boyd, who had just come up. "Young Chambers passed five minutes ago goin' into the Peak with the news. He says that Millar, the Scottie, found a sixteen-ounce slug while dry-blowing in Nuggety Gulch out in the 'Shoe.'"

"Those Scotties is always lucky," growled Tassy; "they would git gold outen bully-beef tins if——" But at this point I dropped asleep.

Next morning the men commenced throwing up the ground on every side, and early in the forenoon about fifty slugs were found, ranging in weight from one pennyweight to half an ounce. Naturally this gave great encouragement to the men, and feats of sinking were performed that eclipsed all I had ever witnessed elsewhere. As soon as possible I went into Peak Hill to order stores and to procure miners' rights for Mac and myself, for although Abbots said that he never troubled about mining rights, I knew we had but a poor chance of being able to hold our claim should it become known that we had none.

Peak Hill at first sight seemed a city of drinking-saloons, and further acquaintance served but to deepen that impression. The only other erections were some half a dozen stores, a warden's house, post-office,



PEAK HILL:
THE ARRIVAL OF A TEAM WITH STORES AND MINING MACHINERY

miners' institute, hospital, and prison ; the church had yet to be built.

The conditions under which gold is found in Peak Hill are considered among the most remarkable in the world. It exists at several distinct levels, but in unaccountably isolated patches. The first discoverers of the district passed over the site of Peak Hill without finding any auriferous traces, and the second party sunk two shafts in the centre of the ground on which the town now stands, but without result. A third party, in sinking for water near the first shaft, suddenly came upon a conglomeration marvellously rich in gold ; two days later four hundred men from the Murchison fields were on the spot, and Peak Hill sprang into existence. For a long time the returns were unsatisfactory, for although one man might obtain fifteen ounces of gold from a ton of soft pipe-clay, those holding the adjoining claims would probably be working in a hard iron-stone bar and finding nothing. It is now known that the rich patches are nothing else than the flumes of old volcanoes ; but as there is also indisputable evidence that Peak Hill city and its workings occupy the bed of an ancient lake, mineralogists are as puzzled as ever to account for the paradoxical conditions. It is clear, however, that if these phenomenal fissure formations are really alluvial deposits (which they appear to be), there must be an enormous outcropping reef yet to be discovered in the vicinity ; while if the gold were first cast out by subterranean agencies, obviously the mother lode must be deep in the bowels of the earth. A few geologists seem to think that there have been several distinct volcanic outbursts, followed by as many inundations, and that comparatively recently,

the water, finding egress to the north, formed the alluvial flats of Ravelstone, the Six Mile, and other centres, leaving Peak Hill as it is to-day. This, of course, leaves matters as bad as before; but beyond saying that I have since found evidence which seems to show that the gold originally came from a great central belt as yet undefined, but whose feeders, I know, outcrop at various points right across the continent, I am not able to offer an opinion.

There are now several famous mines in the neighbourhood, all ranking among the richest gold producers of the world, and, of course, owned by limited companies in London. These mines comprise the various claims of the early pioneers, who, being unable to work the strange conglomeration in which the gold so plentifully abounded, were forced to sell to the highest bidders. Fortunately for them, the fame of the Daisy Bell, Atlantic, Golden Chimes, North Star, and a few others had already spread to all parts of the world, and as some of those claims yielded ten ounces of the precious metal to the ton of ore, it will readily be understood that the bidding was high indeed. About two hundred and fifty men find constant employment in the large mines at wages which soon enable them to become capitalists on their own account; hence a somewhat strange state of affairs obtains in the Peak Hill district. This is a sort of arrangement between those who work for wages and those sons of freedom who do not, in which the wage-earner pays the expenses of the prospector, and shares equally in any profits arising from the latter's discoveries. In most cases the capitalist of the party also strikes out for himself after a few turns of luck have befallen his partner,

and consequently the mines have to be kept going by new arrivals, the majority of whom are sent out from England for that purpose. In course of time the new-comer is seized with the speculating fever, and then the first needy prospector he meets becomes his partner on the half-profit system ; but ultimately he too follows the example of his predecessors, and never more will he sell his glorious independence for money. Some of the companies are now sinking deep proving-shafts in endeavour to trace the trend of the auriferous strata, but few of the independent miners are concerned as to its origin. "The gold's here," one said to me, "an' the banks won't give a sixpence more for it though it came straight from—you know." I did ; but was surprised that he, being an Australian, had not named the place.

When I got back to the Six Mile I hardly recognized the place, so greatly had the surface of the ground been altered. Mac was building up the wrecked wheel of Abbots's bicycle, and that gentleman was fast disappearing from view in his shaft.

"How much is gold worth in this country?" enquired Mac abruptly, as I lit the fire for cooking purposes.

"Four pounds an ounce. Have you got any?"

"Ay, I picked up some nuggets this mornin'—but see that naebody comes." Rising and walking over to his own bicycle, which was lying neglected on the sand, he unfastened the seat-pillar and shook from the tubes one eight-ounce nugget and four smaller ones.

"Great Scot ! Mac, where did you get them?" I cried.

"Ow'r in Ginger Billy's claim. He's sleeping."

"But they belong to him!"

"I wouldna gie much fur his chances o' ever seein' them. He tell't me this mornin' that I was a new chum, an' wouldna ken gold when I saw it, so——"

A footstep sounded behind us, and, turning, I saw Abbots. "Good-day, mates!" he cried, "we've struck it."

"Struck what?" I asked.

"Gold. But say, don't handle me with Abbots now; Tucker Harry is what the boys all call me, 'cause I'm always hungry."

"So am I," sympathized Mac. "But what hae ye got there?"

"A ten-ounce slug, Scottie; put it in yer bank."

"But," I said, "we can't take your gold."

"Ain't it good gold?"

"Yes; but we are not bushrangers. You found the nugget; go on and find another."

"Then ye won't have me for a mate? I don't want nothing, an'——"

"Is that what you have been driving at? Here, you can attend to this fire better than I; prepare the best dinner our larder affords—for three." Abbots's delight was great, but what he gained by the partnership neither Mac nor I could understand. He was an excellent cook, however, and fifteen minutes later we sat down to a dinner of rice, tinned meat, "kill-me-quicks" (a sort of fritter), jam, and tea, in the midst of enjoying which the Prophet strolled up and eyed us strangely.

"Good-day!" he said in a mournful voice.

"D'ye like bully-beef?" Mac answered. "It's gey dear aboot here, but I wouldna mind doing withoot it mysel' to see ye lookin' less starved like."

The Prophet shook his head, and his face assumed a peculiar expression. "There ain't much good wasting good dog on me, Scottie," he said.

"We'll try it's effects, at any rate," I said, making room for him under our improvised shed, while Mac sliced and handed to him the contents of a tin of alleged roast beef.

"Say, Boss, ye doesn't mind me saying things, does ye?" our guest continued, ravenously attacking the substance.

"Not a bit," I replied. "Personally, I don't care though you prophesy I'll be drowned in a fresh-water lake to-morrow,—but why, man, you are actually starving!"

"No, it ain't that altogether; but say, is it long since you two struck this country?"

"Not long enough to take root."

"An' ye didn't have to git from the Old Country?"

"Great Scot, no! We left of our own free will."

"An' has ye money to go back?"

"Oh, I think so! We can always cycle part of the way, you know."

"Well, git now, for as sure as I'm peggin' out, ye'll not be able soon."

"Why, what is going to happen?"

"'Cause I've been tryin' to git this last thirty years, but no man can once he hears the mopoke call. I walked here from South Australia in the seventies. I came 'cause—well—there ain't no good talking now. I've no friends, no people, no nothin' anywhere, for as soon as I git to like any man he dies——"

"Easy, Prophet," interrupted Abbots anxiously; "I'm not tired of life yet."

"An' there's naethin' mair for eatin' till tea-time,"

announced Mac. "If ye come up then, Prophet, ye'll get the best feed ever ye had."

"I reckon he's got the fever bad in his bones," remarked Abbots, as the friendless one walked slowly down the claims; and I feared his words were too true.

During the afternoon Mac and Abbots took turn about at the latter's shaft, lowering it fully six feet without seeing any auriferous traces. In the evening the Prophet appeared again to share our meal, to which were also invited Macnamara and the Irishman; but having received a message from Sergeant Armstrong, who was still on the field, I left Mac and Abbots to entertain our guests and went down to his camp. He informed me that he intended going north to Smith's Station on the Gascoyne River to see if the aborigines had been proving as troublesome as had been reported, and, being desirous of seeing the nature of the country in that direction, I accepted his invitation to accompany him. We set out the following afternoon, the sergeant riding and I cycling.

"We'll have whips of gold when ye get back," cried Abbots, as we left our camp. "But, my colonial, don't you eat any of old Smith's damper; it's a cure, an' no mistake."

When about two miles out on the Horse-shoe trail we saw a man sitting in the sand, and as we approached him I recognized the Prophet.

"Prospecting?" cried Armstrong, riding past.

"I reckon so," came the answer; then, catching my eye, he said, "Boss, won't ye shake?"

"Surely," I replied, dismounting; "but hadn't you better get back to camp? You are not well."

"I reckon I is goin' now," he said; "but I wanted to shake the hand of a white man first."

"Don't talk nonsense. Here, take a drink from my water-bag," I said, endeavouring to hide my feelings. "You need nursing and feeding, that is all. Go back and tell Scottie you are our mate until I return; he will look after you." I scribbled a line to Mac on an old envelope as I spoke, and handed it to him.

The Prophet's dull eyes kindled with the fever flash, and his gaunt frame shook with emotion. "D'ye mind leavin' me the pencil?" he said, the perspiration forming in beads upon his forehead. "Thank ye! I hope when ye come to the last peg-out ye will have a softer bed than iron-stone. Good-bye!"

I shook hands with him and saw him start for camp, but it was some time before I overtook the sergeant, although he had been riding slowly. "That's Mount Beasly in front," he said, about an hour after I had rejoined him, "and it's a mountain built of solid gold."

"Is not that the peak from which Peak Hill takes its name?" I asked, recognizing the round dome we had seen from the crest above the city.

My companion laughed. "No," he said; "Peak Hill takes its name from an old cone rotten with gold in the centre of the workings. The early boys stuck a cross on it and named the place the Peak, but some Hay Street explorers down in Perth tagged on Hill, and so the thing stands. But we're in Horse-shoe Camp now. Mount Beasly is the highest point of the range which gives it the name."

Horse-shoe is sixteen miles from Peak Hill. It is a settlement of tents and scrub-huts nestling at the base of the horse-shoe-shaped hills, in the ravines of

which gold was first discovered. There is, or was recently, only one erection in the place, and it has the distinction of being post-office, saloon, deputy-warden's office, store, and church.

From a geological point of view the surrounding ranges looked so unpromising that I could not help enquiring how their great auriferous wealth had come to be discovered, and the following is the story as given me by one of the pioneers.

"It was afore the Cue railway got up past Yalgoo, an' we were coming up the Gascoyne valley with stores for the Peak. There is good feed an' whips of water up that way, an' the sea-breeze is a bit of all right at night. One night we were roused by a noise like nothing I knows of, an' the horses came in as skeered as if the niggers' ghinghi were after them. For an hour the sound growed, an' the stars all went out, an' the dingoes an' parrots began howlin' an' screechin', until at last Sam Field cried that it was the Gascoyne comin' down. Like a shot we then remembered that old Wragge of Queensland had prophesied whips of thunder-showers in the west interior, an' we knowed that the Gascoyne feeders drained all the back country. The noise of the water was now like three thunderstorms fightin', so we got the horses into the drays an' hauled for the high land. It was no good. There was no high land nearer than twenty mile, an' though we could not see, we knowed that the water was already fillin' the whole plain. When we saw this we cut out the nags to give them a chance, an' next minute the rush came. My mate Billy, an' Dave Brown, a sundowner goin' to the Peak, went down under, an' I never saw them again. Field an' I got away somehow an' rode like blazes all

through the night, an' when mornin' came we were on the south slope of this range; but the whole desert was a sea as far as the eye could reach. We lived on kangaroos an' parrots for a time, until one day Field chased a bungarrow into a hole an' found a seam of gold running through the rocks that would make a fool of Coolgardie's best. We dollied out some, an' then started out to see what was left of our team. There was nothing, not a cent's worth, so we made our way through the mud—the water had gone down now—on to the Peak, told the boys, an' got stores an' horses an' came back here, an' here we are yet. We know the mountain is full of gold, for we tunnelled it through an' through, an' the darned stuff is everywhere. We are waiting jest now for D—— S—— to git up from Cue. He has offered us fifty thousand pounds for the mountain, an' if he gits here with to-morrow's coach, I reckon there's a good few of the boys will take a spell in the old country."

Such was the story. There were forty claim-holders on the mountain, and between them upwards of five thousand ounces of gold had already been extracted by the simple method of crushing the ore with hammers, etc., and dry-blowing the powder. The evening of our arrival in the camp an express rider came in with the news that the great D—— S—— was in Peak Hill, which caused much speculation and excitement in the little saloon.

At sunrise next morning we started off again, intending to camp on the Gascoyne at night. We halted in the middle of a dwarfed sandal-wood forest for lunch, and, while following the trail of a snake into a slight hollow, I discovered an out-crop carrying fine gold, but heavily impregnated with iron

pyrites. "We can't work it, but it might do to sell to D—— S—— if he hasn't got all the gold-mines he wants by the time we get back," remarked Armstrong. "We can peg it out, in any case," I said, noting that our corner peg was placed in a line with the summit of Mount Beasley and another unnamed peak far out on the eastern horizon.

We reached one of the Gascoyne channels at sundown, and while preparing supper my companion became strangely communicative, and told of his many startling adventures while on the gold escort from Peak Hill to Cue. His stories were very interesting, so much so that the stars one by one sank behind the desert without our noticing the flight of time. Suddenly a faint twinkling light appeared away to the south-west, and, starting up from the fire, I exclaimed: "It is time we were turning in; there is the Cross reappearing. See, it is just coming up. Hallo! what stars are those?"

"That isn't the Cross," the sergeant laughed; "that's what we've been waiting for since sundown. That's niggers; they have been following us all day, and, judging from the number of torch-lights I see around us, I should say there are about three hundred of them."

"You seem very cool about it."

"Why not? But as I was telling you, when the Stake Well gang——"

"Hadn't we better postpone the story for the present? The natives are closing in on us. See! they have formed a complete ring of fire round us. Quick! we can still get through, down the channel."

"Not much; that's where they want us to go. Suppose you roll your blanket round that log

there, like what mine is already. That's right ; now, get under that bank and I'll kick the fire into a blaze. No ; they won't touch the old nag, and you needn't get out your pea-shooter. An aboriginal takes revolver bullets like pills."

I did not say anything, knowing it to be useless ; and, in any case, words would not mend matters. From our position under an overhanging bank about twenty yards away from our fire we could see the ring of torch-lights converging, and soon the forms of the natives could be distinguished. They were not adorned with the usual corroboree embellishments, and from that fact I derived some consolation. Suddenly the whizz of a flying spear broke the intense silence, and a ferocious barbed point stuck in the log in my blanket and broke in two. After a moment's stillness a demoniacal yell burst forth, and a shower of spears stuck in the bank all round us.

"They're coming now," my companion chuckled, drawing something from an inner pocket.

"I wish Mac were here," I said, as the rush of pattering feet sounded closer, "for, candidly, I can't see any particular reason to be amused."

"No, that's just the point. See here !" Seizing our provision-bag, he placed it over his head, then, lighting a match, he applied it to a piece of what I afterwards knew was magnesium wire, and, jumping up on the bank, waved it round his head, meanwhile shouting the words, "Ghinghi ! ghinghi ! ghinghi !" The effect was magical. In an instant the desert resounded with terrified cries of "Ghinghi ! ghinghi !" The headlong rush was stayed, the torches were dropped, and the band of warriors broke and fled

in all directions. Their dread of the ghinghi must have been great, but, looking up from my cramped position at the flour-covered figure in the centre of the spectral glare of the flash-light, I could not help thinking that many people less superstitious than the poor aborigines might also have been frightened by the gallant sergeant.

"Well, isn't this as good as a fight?" he laughed, a few seconds later, dropping down beside me. "You may go to sleep now, for the nigs won't come back here while they live."

"Do you always carry fireworks?" I asked, when his mirth had subsided.

"Only when going among these people. But isn't the magnesium wire a good thing? I got the idea from a broken-down chemist fellow in Kalgoorlie. Do you happen to know of any other likely dodge?"

"I should advise you to lay in a stock of the metal sodium," I replied; "it takes fire when thrown upon water, and you could easily work up something from that fact."

My friend took a note of the name, and then we went to sleep. At sunrise we were off again, and about ten o'clock we arrived at Smith's Station, the farthest outpost in that part of West Australia. The owner was very indignant when informed that we had come out to rescue him.

"Do you think the ab's would trouble me?" he said. "Why, I'm half a nigger myself. Some gins came round here the other day wantin' tucker, but when my men gave them some flour they cleared again, an' we haven't seen them since. But come in an' dine. The boys are all out turnin' up a

reef 'bout twenty miles back, an' I'm mighty glad to see ye."

We stayed two days with the rough-and-ready pioneer, and then started on the back track, getting in to Horse-shoe the following afternoon without adventure. The camp was a scene of wild excitement.

"I'm a capitalist!" shouted the first miner we met. "What will you sell me something for?" I suggested that there was a store on the field which might answer his purpose. "No, darn it, no!" he cried. "It's all burst up. We got the last drinks at five shillings a shandy. D—— S—— has been here an' bought all the darned mountain, an' the boys are jiggered to know what to do with their money. Say, stranger, sell me something or I'll——"

"I'll bank your money for you," said Armstrong kindly, "and would strongly advise you to take a spell down at Geraldton. You need it; and the coach leaves the Peak to-night."

Soon after we saw the men depart in a body for Peak Hill, and, thinking they would get along better without our company, we left them, and an hour later rode into the Six Mile. Here the men seemed even more excited than in Horse-shoe; but the proximity of the Peak Hill saloons accounted for much of that.

"That London fellow has been here an' bought all the men's claims," Mac told me. "He gave two hundred for each single man's share on chance."

"But they were worth much more, Mac. We found nuggets on the surface."

"That's verra true—in fact that's the reason the man wanted the claims; but, ye see, Langlegs an'

me bottomed oor shaft through the nicht afore they were sell't."

"You need not say more, Mac; but were there no other shafts down?"

"No," cried Abbots, coming forward; "an' ours was the duffered'st duffer that ever I seed."

At this moment some of the men came up to enquire the news from the north, and, seeing that the Prophet was not among them, I asked where he was.

"I reckon he's pegged out," said Ginger Billy. "He had it bad the last time I saw him 'bout four days back."

"He cyant be here, for the Bonanza manager jumped his claim just afore it was sold," said the Irishman.

"Come, men," I cried, "we must trace him; he will die!"

"I reckon he's started on the long trail by this time," said Tassy; "but we'll come."

We had not far to go. I led the way to where I had last parted from him, and the bright moonlight made the rest easy. Under a shadeless mulga-tree we found him, a broken branch lying over him to keep the fiendish crows away. He lay huddled round the roots, face downwards on the sand, and tightly clutched in his fingers was the envelope I had given him, on which was scrawled, in addition to my lines to Mac: "Jim Flinders, South Aus. Give my claim to Scottie and his mate."

"He's got a claim now that no man can jump," spoke Tassy, turning away his uncovered head.

"An' there ain't no more duffers on it," said Abbots quietly.

I did not speak, nor did Mac ; we could not.

"You boys needn't take it so badly," said Armstrong, some time after we had got back to camp. "It's the usual thing for the boys to do in these parts when their call comes. He's only gone to see where the pelican builds."

"I think we've been long enough in this part of the world," I answered. "Get ready the machines, Mac."

"But, great snakes! you are not going now? The track south will be crowded with all sorts of men coming north to stake off land on account of the 'rush' here. And, anyhow, what about our reef out on the Gascoyne flats?"

"You can have it all for me," I replied ; "we are going now."

"Good-bye, then, mates!" cried Abbots in a wistful tone of voice. "I reckon I can go an' peg out too now."

"I will make Mac talk to you if you speak like that again. Get ready."

"What! Am I comin'?"

"Certainly. You are our mate, are you not?"

The moon was high in the heavens, and the stars of the south were tinged with the red of approaching midnight when we gained the crest from which we had first gazed upon Peak Hill City. Down in the pestilential valley the saloons were doing a roaring trade with the lucky miners of Horse-shoe and the Six Mile, who, by morning, would probably be as poor as ever. As we stood a faint hurrah floated upwards to our ears, signalling the departure of the mail-coach with passengers for the coast—and home. Next minute the kerosene flares were hidden from

our view. On through the night we rushed, down over the Murchison flats, thence by the pool of Mindaroo, until the glistening salt-plains shone out ahead, and, but for the jarring rattle of the nuggets in the tubes of Mac's machine, the night was silent.

“ Where the Mopoke Calls ”

WE were four months out on an exploring journey in Western Australia, our main object being the tracing up of auriferous areas supposed by many geologists to extend right across the Island Continent. Our course had been due east since the start, and we were close on the 127th meridian when an incident occurred which helped greatly to relieve the monotony of our weary pilgrimage. Far on the horizon, a few points north of our line of march, a dim haze appeared against the cloudless sky, which, as we proceeded, gradually outlined into a well-defined mountain of somewhat volcanic aspect. It was the first break in the dreary landscape for weeks, and we hailed it joyfully ; but, nevertheless, I was not disposed to alter our direction of travel for the purpose of paying it a visit. I was anxious to reach the eastward limit of our journeyings as quickly as possible.

It so happened, however, that my companions did not quite fall in with my ideas in this respect, and the more I argued the matter the more enthusiastic they became in their desire to view the desert sentinel at close range. Even Phil, the geologist, betrayed an unusual interest in the grim-looking mount.

“It is quite possible,” he said, “that it may be one of the outcrops we are looking for.”

"I'm afraid there is not much chance of that," I answered. "The formation looks more like basalt or barren iron-stone than anything that might contain gold."

My henchmen, Mac and Stewart, who were struggling along in the rear leading the two surviving camels of the expedition, now began to give their opinions.

"The water-bags are gettin' vera flat," said the former individual, suggestively drawing my attention to the canvas bags overlapping Slavery's tough hide, "an' there's mebbe a soak o' some sort at the foot o' the hill."

"An' we'll get rubies in the gullies," broke in his companion, with great eagerness.

Here I should mention that several beautifully-coloured pebbles had been picked up in a dry ravine some fifty miles back, and, according to Phil's verdict, these were nothing less than a species of ruby. I had a strong suspicion that they were specimens of considerably less value, but my knowledge of gems was too rudimentary for me to mention my doubts. I could now easily understand why my companions wished to examine the mountain, yet my sympathies were by no means aroused, and for several hours our eastward course was continued unaltered. Then I observed that Mac was developing an extraordinary thirst, which seemed infectious so far as Stewart was concerned, and I watched their depredations on the water-supply with alarm, whereat Phil laughed loudly.

"We'd better steer for the mountain," said he meaningly, "or those thirsty sinners behind will surely burst."

There seemed no alternative, so the route was duly altered, and our lumbering procession headed for its new objective at an uncommonly lively rate. When we halted at mid-day we were within five miles of our goal, which now loomed up as a giant mouldering rock of extremely precipitous ascent. Apparently it was but a conical elevation, tapering from a base which I roughly calculated to be about three-quarters of a mile in diameter. Assuming this to be the case, I had no hesitation in accepting a proposal from Mac to the effect that he and Stewart should round the mountain from the north, while Phil and I, taking the camels with us, explored its southern circumference. This arrangement was made chiefly for the purpose of finding water, if any existed in the vicinity, and there seemed no reason why such a time-saving project should not be employed; but my experience of West Australian mountains was not extensive, or I should have known that they are not always what they seem.

“Don’t put off time, boys,” I cried, as we diverged on a long angle, “we’ll meet you on the other side.”

“We’ll be there first, maist likely,” retorted Mac, and in a few minutes the worthy couple were quite a long distance off, and steering a true course. An hour later we watched them disappear beyond a bluff on the northern face of the mountain; they had out-paced our staggering camel team completely.

And now Phil began to show signs of uneasiness; he scanned the gaunt heights of the crumbling rock anxiously, and looked again and again towards the bluff which hid our companions from view.

“I don’t like the look of things a bit,” he muttered at length. “The mountain has got a much bigger

grip of the ground than I imagined, and we didn't allow enough for perspective when we judged its size."

"It makes little difference," I said. "We bargained to go round, not over it."

Half an hour more and we were forcing an erratic trail across a series of blast-blown, shelving terraces, which marked the lower slopes of the hill, then we bore round to the left through a straggling forest of eucalypti, and gazed on what we had fondly imagined to be the "other side" with dismay. The mountain, which from the westward distance seemed to stand alone, was connected by a saddle-back ridge with still another mountain of nearly similar altitude, and this latter elevation broke away in great "blows" and chaotic steps for many miles before merging into the distant plain.

"What will happen to those beggars?" groaned Phil. "They'll never dream of turning back."

There was considerable cause for alarm. It was quite possible that the slope towards the north was much more gradual than appeared to us, and in that case the true aspect of the deceiving mountain-range would not be noticeable until a long circuit had been made.

"They are quite able to look after themselves," I said, with a cheerfulness which I did not feel; and we resumed our march.

The country we now traversed was of a nature seldom witnessed in these arid latitudes: the soil was hard and strewn with iron-stone gravel; the white, blistering sand of the desert was no longer in evidence, and mallee and mulga shrubs flourished abundantly. Most pleasing to our eyes was an

inviting group of tall lime-trees, which grew in an appreciable hollow where many dry gullies intersected. Eagerly we sought their grateful slope. Such trees exist only in water-bearing areas, and our hopes ran high. Nor were we disappointed. In the centre of the timbered space a shallow lagoon of clearest water lay disclosed. We unloaded the weary beasts and let them drink their fill ; then we waited anxiously on the coming of the wanderers.

“I think we had better go up the hill-side and have a look around,” suggested Phil, after a quarter of an hour had dragged along. The afternoon was already far advanced ; two hours more and it would be quite dusk.

“I hope they haven’t discovered a native camp,” I said, with a new fear arising in my mind ; and I gripped my hunting Winchester and followed him.

The ascent of the barring ridge proved to be no easy matter, and by the time we had reached the belt of scrub feathering the middle altitudes we were both weary and footsore. As we passed through this leafless forest, which formed no shade yet obscured our vision, the crackling, timber-like branches of the mallee broke in our faces, and we had much trouble in evading many lethargic reptiles that lay in our path, or sheltered under the straggling roots of the shrubs. It looked as if all the most hideous crawling creatures on the face of the earth had found refuge here, and we trod their chosen haunts cautiously, not knowing how venomous some of them might be. The sharp edges of the iron-stone rubble cut deeply into our much-worn boots and lacerated our feet, and when we emerged into the open and clambered over smooth, glistening rocks that were as hot as

Nebuchadnezzar's furnace, we felt that our limit of endurance had been surely reached. Right heartily did we curse the absent couple at this stage of our upward progress, and I mentally vowed to give West Australian mountains a very wide berth in future. Once before had I come to grief in a somewhat similar fashion, and the memory of that escapade now came back to me in all its vividness.

At last the torturesome climb came near an end, and with a final effort we drew ourselves on to the climaxing ridge and gazed abroad into the blistering plains beyond. So severe had our exertion been that for the moment we had forgotten the main import of our climb in the relief that was ours when it was over. But we were quickly recalled to a lively sense of the position of affairs. Far out in the open a strange sight met our gaze, which drew a cry of alarm from Phil, and caused me to unstrap my rifle with exceeding haste. There were our ubiquitous companions, sure enough, but they were running towards us as if for dear life, while close behind fully a score of stalwart natives bounded in hot pursuit.

"They're dead meat this time," groaned Phil despairingly. "We can do nothing to help them."

By the look of things there certainly seemed little hope for the fugitives. "I'll try a long shot, anyhow," I said, and, sliding the sighting-bar of my rifle out to its fullest extent, I glanced along the barrel and fired. The sharp crash of the exploding cordite shattered the solemn stillness, and the iron mountain trembled as it gave back the thunderous echoes.

"Short," muttered Phil.

So it was. I saw the sand fly up almost a hundred yards out of range.

“How could they have wandered out so far?” Phil cried, shaking his fist at the charging blacks in impotent rage.

And now the faint boom of Mac’s gun floated to our ears, and the pursuing band checked for a brief space their mad rush ; but their interest in the chase was evidently of no mean order, and again they renewed their impetuous race. Nearer and nearer came the savage panorama, and I marvelled at the extraordinary turn of speed which our valiant associates displayed. Theirs was indeed a run for life, and none knew it better than themselves. Once more I levelled my rifle and sent a nickel-nosed bullet whistling into space, and this time I had not miscalculated the distance. The ball struck a sandstone boulder immediately in front of the pursuers, shivering it into fragments which hurtled high into the air. A yell broke from the bloodthirsty band, but they never hesitated, and now I observed with dismay that the gap between them and their quarry was slowly but surely lessening.

“Run, you beggars, run !” roared Phil, semaphoring excitedly.

They did run, and run well ; but it was clear that their energies were spent. The blacks were now within spear - throw, and soon the air was thick with the flying barbs, and waddies were brandished triumphantly. I emptied the magazine of my repeater in record time, and had the satisfaction of seeing one or two of the most prominent warriors relinquish interest in the fray, while a hoarse cheer rolled up to us, showing how truly our comrades

appreciated my diversion. Never before had I witnessed such a determined attack by an aboriginal tribe.

On fled the fugitives; now they were directly beneath us, and they came bursting up the face of the mountain through wildering scrub and over a glass-edged rubble. Stewart led the advance, his long legs stretching over the ground with remarkable rapidity, while a few yards behind his more portly companion rolled along manfully, glancing apprehensively over his shoulder every now and then, and hugging his empty breech-loader with tenacious grip. With frenzied yells of baffled rage the fierce horde saw their intended prey slip from their grasp; they feared to venture nearer the engine of destruction which I wielded from aloft. Many of their brethren had been sorely wounded by its unseen messengers. They had had enough. With harsh, wailing cries they retreated precipitately as they had come.

Five minutes later Stewart clambered up to the ridge on which we stood, breathing heavily. Mac followed closely, blowing like a grampus, but with a distinctly malevolent expression showing in his face.

"To think that I shid have had to run like that frae—frae niggers!" he spluttered indignantly; and his compatriot gave a feeble grunt in sympathy.

Then Phil found his voice. "What in the name of all that's wonderful were you doing so far away?" he demanded sternly. "You didn't expect to find water out on the flats, did you?"

The culprits looked somewhat abashed, but speedily recovered their equanimity.

“We found some roobies in the gully doon below,” began Stewart glibly, turning out his treasures for our inspection.

“An’ of course we followed the channel, looking for more,” added Mac, with much complacence, looking towards me for the approval which was not forthcoming. “And,” he continued, with diminishing enthusiasm, “we were right in the middle o’ a native camp afore we noticed the black deevils.”

Their late enemies, congregated at the base of the hill, at this moment united in a shrill scream of defiance, and brandished their war-clubs threateningly.

“We’d better return to camp, boys,” I said, “and the sooner we clear out of this quarter the better.”

But with a righteous wrath swelling in their hearts, the two stood forth on a rocky eminence, and, glaring towards the hostile group, consigned it collectively and individually to the warmest department in Hades, with language at once forcible and emphatic. When they had exhausted their store of expletives, they turned and followed Phil and me down the steep rock-face, and then, apparently for the first time, they observed the puzzling contour of the mountain they had set out to circumscribe.

“We wad have been a long time traivellin’ roond this—this hillock,” grumbled Mac.

“It wis the golologist’s mistak’,” insinuated Stewart promptly.

“Why, you precious pair of heavenly twins,” shouted Phil, amazed at the crafty rebuke, “you ought to be mighty thankful we came to look for you, which we wouldn’t have done had the mountain been circular, as we imagined.”

"Weel, weel," soothingly returned the first speaker, "we'll say nae mair aboot it;" with which non-committal reflection he relapsed into a gloomy silence.

The shadows of night were closing in when we arrived at the foot of the mountain and steered for our camp among the timber, and a vague, eerie feeling took possession of us as we threaded our way through the statuesque array of mulga and mallee bushes that intervened between us and the lime-tree clump. The air was close and heavy, and filled with a peculiar odour, which I tried in vain to distinguish, and the mopoke's dismal monotone sounded incessantly through the gloom.

"We'll certainly get out of this locality in the morning," I repeated, as we entered the hollow of the limes. Then I started back in surprise, for a fire had suddenly burst into flame close to the edge of the lagoon, and its ruddy glare revealed the presence of about a dozen branded and feather-bedecked aborigines who were squatting around the pool as if in deep meditation. The camel baggage lay some distance off, just where we had unloaded the wiry animals, and had apparently not been interfered with in any way. Indeed, the crouching warriors seemed to be fast asleep, so steadily did they stare into the watery depths. I can hardly say that I was much surprised by the spectacle afforded. Knowing that natives were in the vicinity, I had anticipated that our chosen camping-ground would be a favourite meeting-place, and hence my eagerness to depart.

"It seems an odd sort of circus," murmured Phil, when we had drawn back a little way. "It's not a corroboree get-up, and it's not a funeral ceremony."

“But it will be in twa or three meenits,” interrupted Mac grimly, examining the charges of his gun with critical interest. “I hae suffered much the day, an’ it’s my turn to laugh noo.”

“It’s not the same lot, Mac,” I explained, pressing down the gaunt, black tube he would have directed forward, much to his disgust.

Looking between the tall, white tree-trunks we watched the silent assembly for several minutes with increasing wonder. I had encountered many strange native tribes in Australia, but a mute ceremonial such as this I had never before witnessed. Then the true significance of the scene flashed upon me, and I wondered that I had not thought of it before. The poor nomads of the far interior have many gods, but none more powerful than the dread “Wangul,” the mighty “Dweller in the Waters.”¹ We were surely spectators of a form of worship calculated to propitiate this spirit or invoke his aid.

“I believe you have struck it,” said Phil, when I communicated my belief. “They are most probably making application to have the white intruders into their domain removed without delay.”

“Then they shall be gratified in the morning,” I answered. “Meanwhile, I think we may safely venture to disturb their meditations.”

Slowly we moved forward, keeping in the shadow of the trees as much as possible, but making no attempt to tread noiselessly. Not one of the dusky savages stirred until we stood almost beside the weird-looking circle; then the fire-feeder glanced up drowsily, sprang to his feet with a scream of terror, and disappeared immediately into the bush behind.

¹ The bunyip of the eastern states.

One by one the strange company followed suit, each warrior arising with an effort and staggering blindly after his neighbour, moaning dismally meanwhile. We stood watching the curious exodus in amazement.

“By Jove!” laughed Phil, “the beggars were actually drunk!”

A small, hollowed piece of wood, half-filled with a greyish-yellow fluid, attracted my attention. I examined it carefully, and smelt the noxious-looking contents.

“You are right, Phil,” I said. “This is the nearest approach to pidcherie I have ever seen in Western Australia. No wonder the air is so powerful in the vicinity.”

It was not the first time I had known aborigines to be under the influence of this strange ingredient ; but whether they partook of it in this case merely to promote a drunken orgie, or as a soothing balm to their devotional exercises, I was unable to guess. Our eventful day had ended without mishap, and for that I was truly thankful. We cleared away the various native weapons that were littered around, and spread out our blankets on the clearest space available ; then we indulged in a sumptuous repast on the inevitable tinned dog and damper, to the accompaniment of many libations of boiled tea. Next we posted a watch, and slumbered peacefully in turn until daybreak.

We rounded up the camels and renewed our march soon after breakfast ; but many weeks elapsed before we again encountered a native tribe.

The Pearling-Grounds of Australia

A LITTLE-KNOWN portion of the globe is that tract of land which forms the north-western division of Australia, and includes one of the most barren wastes as well as one of the most mountainous regions in the whole of the Island Continent. The district is properly termed the *Terra Incognita* of Australia, and few have explored its trackless deserts or penetrated the fastnesses of the gigantic Leopold ranges.

Here a fiercely hostile tribe of aborigines holds sway, whose grim reputation does not tend to entice the wanderer. Strange tales of cannibalism not infrequently reach the coast, and it is known that the natives use flint spear-heads dipped in a deadly poison. Small wonder that the country is almost wholly immune from the visits of white men, and the official geographical knowledge of it is practically nil. Yet this mystic "Land of the Never Never" abounds in mineral wealth to an exceptional degree—gold and copper being widely distributed, and diamonds numerous in the more easterly parts of the great plain. Adventurous spirits seeking fresh fields to conquer may well turn their eyes to this little corner of our great empire, where, far from civilization's reach, Nature rules in all her solitary grandeur. But if the interior of this land is rigorously guarded,

the coast is comparatively easy of access, and here, also, rich treasure may be obtained. Along the sea-board, fringing it to a width of many miles, lie the famous Australian pearling-grounds, whereon are found many of the world's finest gems. From Cossack to Port Darwin the lucrative shallows extend, but the richest beds are in Roebuck Bay and its vicinity, where the greater part of the pearling-fleet is usually assembled.

The divers, however, have a partiality for certain localities at different seasons, and for a time—generally in the autumn—many luggers frequent the shoaly waters of the Ninety Mile Beach, which begins at Cape Bossut, sixty miles south of Broome, and stretches towards Port Hedland. Beagle Bay and the Lacipede Islands are favourite haunts in mid-summer, when the weather is proverbially fine, and Cygnet Bay in King Sound provides a good winter shelter. The average “lugger,” from which all diving operations are carried on, is a two-masted craft about thirty-five feet in length and twelve feet across the beam; its chief peculiarity lies in a very small free-board, rendering its life in a moderately rough sea extremely dangerous. Yet this risky design is found necessary to allow the heavily-weighted diver to descend over the gunwale with freedom, and to permit of his being dragged on board from the depths without the use of blocks and tackle. It occasionally happens that these boats become swamped when at a distance from shore, and then the entire crew take refuge in the dinghy. As a rule there is but one white man in each boat, the crew being composed of Malays, while the diver usually hails from Manila or Japan. The diver is

in reality in charge of affairs, for he learns by experience to know where the pearl-oysters are most abundant, and directs the vessel's course accordingly. He receives no regular salary, but is given an interest in "returns," so that his conscientious effort may always be depended upon.

Many people imagine that pearling, like gold-mining or diamond-digging, is in the main a speculative concern, in which failure to obtain the gem means ruin or, at least, useless expenditure of labour, according to the responsibilities undertaken. As a matter of fact pearls play quite a secondary part in the attractive industry. It is the shell that forms the remunerative commodity of these waters; pearls are indeed too scarce in themselves to attract the fortune-seeker. Many hundreds of shells may be opened before one pearl is found, and I have known instances where the jewel has not been seen throughout a whole season. So long, however, as mother-of-pearl commands the price it has done these many years, there will be few failures among the fleets.

The depth at which work is performed rarely exceeds fifteen fathoms. The bivalves are numerous in deeper waters, but no diver can endure the enormous pressure sustained on the lower beds; even a few seasons' work at the fifteen-fathom level practically ends his career. There are no white divers on this coast; nor are there any natives employed to work without the aid of the diving-dress, for the waters abound in sharks, and more than once in earlier days the naked aborigines have been crushed to death by octopoda.

Schooners go out with the lugger fleet and act as

floating stations for the deposit of the shells and as storehouses for the supply of food-stuffs. In many cases these larger vessels seek the shelter of some mangrove-fringed creek within easy access to the working craft; particularly is this the case when the field of operations lies off the Ninety Mile Beach, for here storms are frequent and anchorage unstable. Cape Bossut and the adjoining Lagrange Bay are usually turned into odd-looking townships of stranded vessels in the height of the season.

The diving-work is conducted in the most matter-of-fact manner, little precaution being taken to prevent accident. Fortunately mishaps are rare, thanks in no small measure to the wonderful vitality of the Manilaman diver. No rope ladders are employed; the diver drops heavily from the gunwale, grasping only the plunger-line as a guide to his descent. For the first few fathoms his downward course is alarmingly rapid, while the sensation experienced when the lower depths are reached is not a pleasant one. A novice going down in the "dress" almost invariably turns turtle when a very short distance under water, and this unnerves him so that he usually releases his grip of the plunger-line, and then he may perform several complete revolutions before he lands, probably on his head, among the clinging marine growths. Well do I remember my own initiation into the mysteries and dangers of the diver's life, and ever since I have sympathized deeply with those who explore the hidden caverns of the dark blue waters.

A few years back, after completing an exploring trip across the unknown plains of Western Australia, I struck the north-western coast of that colony at a point some sixty odd miles south of Broome. I was

alone at this time, my two companions having diverged off along the telegraph line with the pack-camels, meaning to meet me at Broome or Derby. I had the idea that I should probably find some pearling-station near at hand, where I might succeed in getting a passage on a lugger to Broome or Derby, and so save myself further tramping through the scrub, and in my first surmise I was not mistaken. Above the eucalyptus growths dotting the sand-wastes near the sea I descried the slanted masts of a schooner which, as I approached, proved to be beached on the edge of a mangrove-fringed creek. That night I enjoyed more comfortable quarters than had fallen to my lot for many a day on board the pearler *Mist*, the supply-vessel for the luggers at work off the Ninety Mile Beach.

There was quite a colony of men camped in the near vicinity, men whose lives for the most part had been lived far from civilization, but in whom the finest traits of manhood lay hid under a brusque exterior. Their greeting to me was cordial and sincere, and I remained three days in their company. Yet I was getting anxious concerning my further progress northwards. As yet no lugger had put in an appearance, and the captain of the *Mist* was by no means certain that any of the fleet would be going into Broome for several weeks, in any case.

"We only left port a few days ago," said he, "and we don't usually go back until the holds are pretty full of pearl-shell."

"And the round journey sometimes takes a good many days," said Wilcox, a master pearler. "Calms or contrary winds are all we get in these blistering latitudes."

"In that case I had better start and walk?" I was beginning.

"Walk be d——d!" howled Wilcox. "You'll do nothing of the sort. Some of the boats will probably come in with this afternoon's tide, and we'll see what can be done then."

"The fact is," added another individual, somewhat gloomily, "we haven't got a man aboard them luggers who could be trusted to reach port safely. They are all together in the bay, and can't lose themselves if they tried, but navigation isn't their line."

"Are there no white men in charge?" I asked hastily.

"I've got a bounder called the Pincher, who looks after the Malays when they are opening shell on deck," laughed Wilcox. "He's nearly always drunk, and knows no more about boats than he does of flying-machines; but he can cuss worse'n any man I've ever met, and that's what counts with the crews we have in our trade."

Late in the day two luggers drifted up the creek and anchored alongside the *Mist*. One was heavily weighted down, and with decks strewn with unopened pearl-oysters. The other rode lightly in the water, a paraphernalia of diving-gear littering her poop.

"These are my craft," remarked Wilcox, with pride. "And, by Jove! the *Snake* has made a good haul."

The crew of both vessels—a black, villainous-looking mob—now scrambled ashore, but no white man was yet to be seen.

"Pincher!" yelled the owner of the argosy. "Where the devil are you, Pincher?"

Then an attenuated specimen of the genus sand-groper emerged from the little cabin of the *Snake*, and

with unsteady steps proceeded towards the awaiting dinghy. "Got full cargo aboard," he hiccupped. "Want a spell now."

"And by the Lord Harry you'll get it!" roared Wilcox, "you slave-driving gin-swiller. You'll have a mutiny on board the *Snake* some of these days if you don't look out."

I soon came to understand that the Pincher, notwithstanding his obvious weakness for strong liquors, was an over-zealous employee, who worked the divers shamefully, and generally abused the swarthy ruffians under his control. I thought, with a shudder, of the probability of my sailing in his company. A more besotted-looking wretch it would have been hard to find. Yet such was to be my fate.

"I say, old man," spoke Wilcox to me after dinner, "I have an idea that might suit you. The *Snake* must go up to Broome to deposit her shell at Streeters.¹ Will you sail her up for me? The Pincher can go with you, and I'll risk him taking her back empty—she's insured, you know."

"Such a contract is hardly in my line——" I was starting to explain.

But he misunderstood me. "You'll manage all right," he said, waving his hand deprecatingly. "There's a compass—or ought to be—aboard. Give her plenty sea room; and see that the Pincher doesn't drink too much gin. Where he gets it beats me."

So it happened that a most unenviable position was thrust upon me, and I had no sooner promised to take it in hand than dire forebodings of disaster began to loom up drearily before my eyes. Next morning the pearling lugger *Snake* moved out with the oily tide,

¹ Streeters = wholesale shell buyers having agents all over the world.

and, sitting abaft the hatchway, I waved good-bye to my generous friends ashore, while the Pincher addressed himself in forcible language to the long-suffering native crew, "just to keep them in their place," as he told me cheerfully. In a few minutes we had reached the open sea; but treacherous reefs broke the calm Indian Ocean swells as far as the eye could reach, so I made a due westerly course until all land obstacles had faded from view. Then I bethought me of the necessary compass that should have been in evidence beside the tiller. "Pincher," I said, "where's the compass?"

He grinned, and directed my attention to the interior of the cabin, where, to my horror, I saw the compass, box and all, fastened securely to the wall in a vertical position. "Looks just like a clock," he said gravely, "but it is a fraud, for the darned thing won't go."

How long it had been in that position I feared to ask, and I jammed the helm hard down and tried to get a glimpse of land in the eastward distance before it was too late. When the coast-line could again be traced I felt more at ease, though I dreaded to think what might happen should the oncoming night be dark and the stars obscured. The long day passed wearily. The lightest of zephyr breezes prevailed, and our progress was alarmingly slow. Then, as the darkening shadows of night began to close round, I observed with considerable uneasiness that the half-dozen Malays who comprised the crew were beginning to take undue liberties with the progress of the vessel. They shortened sail when the slightest breeze got up, and otherwise made it apparent that they wished our voyage to continue in a very

leisurely manner indeed. I knew so little about sailing craft that I hesitated to interfere. The Pincher had evidently gone to sleep in the cabin, so that I could get little assistance or advice from him. But when the evil-looking band congregated on the for'ard hatch and proceeded to indulge in a noisy harangue, which I could not understand, I thought things were not just exactly as they ought to be. The diver, who had been pointed out to me as being an unusually respectable member of his class, was a prominent figure among the wranglers, and he glanced at me strangely now and then during the course of the council meeting. To him I addressed myself shortly :

“Mariano, take the reef out of the lug-sail and run up the jib.”

He seemed vastly startled by the simple order, and stared at me curiously for some time before making any movement towards obeying the command. Then I repeated my words with sterner emphasis. “And fetch me a lamp,” I added.

The gloom was deepening fast. The crouching objects on the deck were becoming no longer distinctly visible. Instinctively I felt for my revolver with my free hand, and, having grasped the friendly butt thereof, was encouraged to make a few remarks anent the slowness of the *Snake's* crew. But Mariano was now hastening towards me with a huge mast-head lamp which he had found, and the rest of the sullen group began to shake out the canvas as I had instructed. The diver, I should mention, was a Manilaman, and his coppery features struck me as being quite intelligent in expression. He stood before me for some moments trimming the smoking

wick, then he knelt down and placed the lamp at my feet, and as he did so he whispered the warning words in my ear : "No sleep to-night. You know?"

"All right, Mariano!" I answered quietly. "Wake the Pincher."

He shook his woolly head meaningly, and hastily rejoined his companions. Assuredly matters were reaching an unpleasant climax. And now a fresh breeze began to blow in from the sea, and the *Snake* had staggered close inshore before I realized our perilous position. There are no lights on this desolate coast, and the ominous sound of the breakers alone guide the land-hugging mariner on a murky night, while on this occasion I had to be both pilot and look-out, directing a clumsy and heavily-laden craft through waters I had never sailed before. I believe that nothing would have pleased the crew better than to see me run the lugger ashore, and the howl of regret that arose when I detected the danger was too uncomfortably sincere for my taste.

"Pincher!" I roared. "Pincher."

Only loud drunken snores issued from the cabin in reply. I dared not show my fears to the lynx-eyed mob on the fore-deck by calling on Mariano to assist, and probably it would not have been prudent to single him out from the rest at this stage, so I tied the tiller down with a piece of hawser lying near, and, stepping forward, kicked the cabin door open. All was dark within. I seized the lantern and held it down, and there the Pincher lay, sleeping the sleep of the drunken, with an empty gin-bottle lying on his breast. I saw it was useless to try and wake him, and, leaving the hatchway wide open, I returned to my post, and did my best to fix a NNE. course.

The night continued black and dismal—not a star shone in the sky—only the phosphorescent glimmer on the surging waters guided me. I prayed fervently for the morning, and it was yet but midnight.

For another hour the wind steadily increased in force, and the lugger buffeted with cross seas and thrashed ahead nobly. The waves rolled over her whalebacked bow in a ceaseless stream and wallowed in the scuppers in effervescing pools of foam, and the flying spray drenched me in saline showers. Still all canvas remained spread, though every moment I expected the great lug-sails to be blown into ribbons. Then the gale settled in to blow steadily from the west, and the buoyant craft heeled over until her lee rail was buried in boiling surf, and her tough timbers trembled as she shouldered off the dark-green rollers and dashed heavily into the vortices of succeeding swells. One by one the treacherous group forward groped his way into the safety of the fo'castlehead, and by two o'clock in the morning I alone remained on deck. But the brief storm had already spent itself; the wind subsided as quickly as it had risen, and the clouds rolled away from the face of the sky, disclosing myriads of twinkling stars which shot their pale light over the wide waste of waters, and threw into prominence the dreaded rocky coast on our starboard quarter. And now a heavy drowsiness seized me, which, try as I might, would not be shaken off. The long anxious vigil had been too much for me. When keeping watch in the interior country we were in the habit of relieving each other every two hours, but here I was alone—worse than alone, for, had not the doughty Pincher been present, I doubt if

there would have been any necessity for my keeping awake all through the night. Inwardly cursing that slumbering individual, I set a new course by the stars, and headed as nearly as I could guess for Roebuck Bay. How far we had travelled on our way I had not the faintest idea. Perhaps the Pincher would recognize some landmark when he awoke. . . .

I roused myself with a start. The lugger was gliding along almost on even keel, the sails were flapping noisily — sure signal that the steersman had been napping—and crawling aft stealthily on hands and knees five dark forms were plainly discernible. For a moment I was stunned into incapability of action — the creeping figures had almost reached the open hatchway leading to the cabin. Then I started to my feet, and at the same time the mutineers, uniting in a yell of rage, sprang towards the stair. I saw the vague glint of steel as murderous-looking knives were drawn, then I emptied my revolver as rapidly as I could pull the trigger. Taken by surprise they staggered backward, apparently unhurt, and in the brief respite afforded I reloaded my weapon. With hoarse yells they came on again. “The Pincher! the Pincher!” they growled ferociously. I thought it was all up with the Pincher, and I did not reckon much on my own chances of seeing the morning; but I did the best I could under the circumstances, and for a few seconds the deck was turned into a pandemonium. Throughout the *mêlée* it was very evident that the mutineers did not wish to hurt me any more than they could conveniently help. Whether they had other views for my welfare, or

whether they desired my further services as pilot, I am by no means certain, but I rather fancy the latter idea to be the correct one. In any case, they refrained from damaging me in any material way, though I am convinced they could have done so if they chose. The forward deck was littered with pearl-shells, and they would have made very effective missiles, yet none came in my direction, and because of that I marvelled greatly. One thinks quickly on such occasions, and many strange fancies flitted across my brain in those few moments. Then I heard Mariano's gentle tones raised in anxious entreaty: "Don't shoot. Let them get Pincher. He no good anyway." They made another rush, and I was sent reeling backwards over the tiller; but as I fell an unexpected diversion occurred.

"Who wants the Pincher?" bellowed a hoarse voice from the cabin. That much-sought-after gentleman had awakened at an opportune moment. "You'll be full up of the Pincher before he's finished with you, you black vermin!"

I struggled to my feet in time to see the roused champion essay to climb the narrow steps towards the deck. In his hand he clutched the empty gin bottle. The Malays made a wild dash at him with their drawn knives. There came the sound of splintering glass as the warrior's weapon met them full in the face, and they surged backwards. The Pincher was certainly sober enough now, and seemed to have the strength of ten men.

"Have they slaughtered you?" he howled, catching a glimpse of me trying to regain my footing. Then he clutched at the lamp which lay flaring on the deck, and with a mighty sweep struck at the clustering

heads, while the sulphurous flood that issued from his lips filled the night with its vehemence.

“Back to your quarters!” he roared. “Back, you black swine. . . .” And back they rushed precipitately, pursued by the redoubtable Pincher, who seemed now like a raving madman. Crash! The *Snake’s* timbers shuddered at the shock; the flapping sails swayed forward, and slowly the lugger heeled over until her gunwale lapped the surface of the water. We had grounded on a sand-bar at the entrance to Roebuck Bay.

“Just our luck,” grumbled the Pincher, sauntering aft and sitting down beside me. “We’ll have to stick here until the tide lifts us over.”

The first grey streaks of dawn were now beginning to appear, and the low-lying coast was dully visible. “What about the crew?” I asked, wondering how the news of the outbreak would be received on shore.

He laughed. “Them beasts!” said he. “Oh, they’re quiet enough now. That ruction was nothing much. I never can get a decent sleep without being disturbed. But it was lucky I awoke when I did, wasn’t it?” I said it was.

Having reached Broome, I was agreeably surprised to meet my companions, who had arrived overland on the preceding day. The few whites then in the settlement interpreted the laws of hospitality in a generous manner, and I was afforded every opportunity of watching the luggers at work in and around Roebuck Bay. Meanwhile we ostensibly put up at one of the hotels on shore, though, to escape mosquitoes and kindred pests, we invariably carried our camp blankets out to the end of the rough wharf in the evenings, at which time the air was usually filled with the in-

describable clamour of drunken coolies and the weird drum-beating of the everlasting Malay concerts. The Japanese element, too, after sundown became especially boisterous, and their harsh, unmusical chants, accompanied by much hand-clapping and cymbal-clashing, was diabolical in the extreme.

After a week of this sort of thing I was glad indeed to accept an invitation to visit Cape Bossut in the lugger *Rose*, which was about to set out on a lengthy cruise. So I embarked without delay, thankful at the prospect of a few days' rest on the waters. The owner of the lugger at the last moment decided not to sail with me. The monsoon season was approaching, he said, and he was not a good sailor. So, when the anchor was raised, and the *Rose* was threading her way out among the sand-banks, I realized that the only white man on board other than myself was an elongated specimen of the genus sand-groper just recovering from the effects of a prolonged debauch on shore. I found this individual to be good-natured enough, but wholly ignorant of seamanship; and, as the vessel possessed no chart of the route, we had perforce to steer close inshore and trust largely to providence for our safe guidance. The diver, however, was my old friend Mariano. He was an exceptionally intelligent member of his class, and seemed to understand by instinct when any danger threatened; and while the white "commander" slumbered heavily during the long watches of the night, Mariano gave me much interesting information in his soft-voiced, broken English concerning the hazardous nature of the pearlers' work.

About three o'clock in the morning, while the *Rose* was on a long tack seaward, he begged me to go into

the cabin and get a short sleep. I looked at the for'ard deck, where the Malay crew were huddled, presumably asleep, then glanced at my deputy host, who was snoring stentoriously in the lee scuppers, and I hesitated. Mariano laughed. "Me watch," he said significantly, and I was satisfied. I dropped off into dreamland at once, but in five minutes awoke with a start to find myriads of creatures swarming over my face and body. I grabbed wildly and caught something; it was a huge cockroach. Going hastily on deck, I was greeted by the commander, who had just awakened. "Yes, mate," he said gravely, "you need to be very drunk before you can sleep down there;" and I felt inclined to agree with him.

Towards daybreak the breeze freshened, and we were soon thrashing to windward through a choppy sea, shipping an alarming amount of water at each plunge; but the headland of Cape Letouche Treville was almost abeam, and a few miles farther south False Cape could be located, where the waves dashed confusedly over the treacherous reefs. The commander was sober enough now, and he set about preparing breakfast in a manner that at once proclaimed the tactics of the bushman. "Sailoring isn't my line," he admitted, with becoming modesty, "but I can handle the nigs all right, an' that's the main thing in this business." As if to illustrate his assertion he thrust his head out of the hatchway, and with sundry sulphurous expletives ordered the pumps and diving gear to be got ready. Mariano, meanwhile, sat by the tiller smiling very broadly. It was evident that he did not think much of my companion's influence with the scowling black-scinned crew.

False Cape was safely weathered, and then we

entered the sheltered waters of Lagrange Bay, where many luggers were assembled. Cape Bossut forms the southern boundary of this pearlers' haven, and we steered slowly towards its mangrove-covered beach. Numerous sea-snakes here surrounded the vessel, gliding hither and thither on the surface of the water. They were, as nearly as I could judge, about four feet long, and their skins were very prettily mottled; but though of extremely venomous appearance, Mariano assured me that they were perfectly harmless. He was evidently also pleased to see these reptiles, and straightway announced his intention of descending to examine their submarine haunts. "Snake feed on oyster," he said to me. "Good sign."

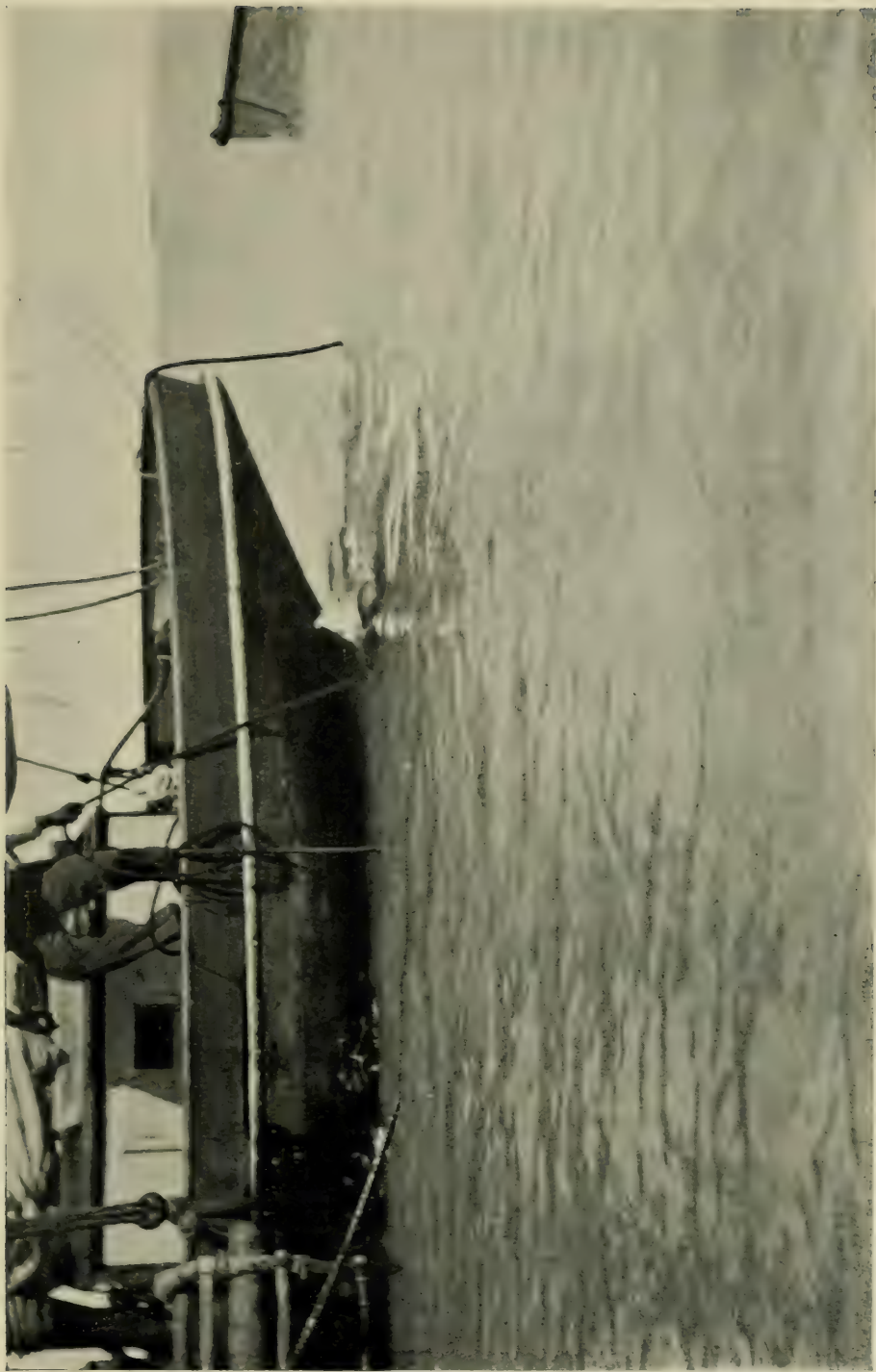
I assisted in having the *Rose* hove to, and then watched further proceedings with much interest. The sounding-line gave the depth as fifteen fathoms, which was considered a satisfactory level, and soon Mariano was encased in his cumbrous rubber suit, with helmet tightly clamped, and the great weighted boots securely fixed. With much difficulty he managed to place his limbs over the gunwale, then he balanced himself see-saw fashion, like some inert monster, while extra weights were laid across his shoulders. The pumps were manned by two evil-looking Malays, who mechanically bent to their labours and sent a wheezing, sputtering current of air coursing through the long tube, which emerged from the escape-valves of the helmet in a hissing, vapoury stream. The plunger-line, having now been thrown overboard, the diver, grasping it tightly, released his grip of the gunwale and flung himself heavily backward. He struck the water with a hollow plunge and disappeared from sight, whilst

the air-bubbles burst furiously over the line of his descent. The long tube paid out in writhing coils, and the air throbbed down with increased intensity as the lower depths were reached. A few minutes passed, and the surface of the sea around had regained its placid aspect, and only the vague air-bubbles indicated the diver's presence below. Another short interval elapsed before Mariano signalled to be raised, and the commander and I began to haul on the slim rope which had paid out with the tube, and quickly the tell-tale bubbles drew nearer and nearer, and hissed more vigorously as the diver rose from the depths. Then suddenly a dark form bobbed up some yards away, and lay flat on the water with limbs extended; and the rushing air blew the wavelets into foam as the strange figure was towed alongside.

"No shell down there," Mariano said laconically, when we undid his helmet; so we pulled him on deck and helped to extricate him from his unwieldy habiliments.

The commander now proposed to take the *Rose* into Cape Bossut Creek, where a stranded schooner could be seen, with several wigwam-like shelters dotting the sand around, but in a too eager moment I intimated my desire to take a plunge in the dress, and to this the commander readily agreed. Mariano, however, did his best to dissuade me from my purpose; but his language was not complete enough to explain why, and I disregarded his advice, for which I was very sorry later.

I was quickly assisted into the clumsy garments, which were several sizes too big for me, and before I had fully realized my intention, I was hanging over the gunwale waiting to receive the helmet over



THE AUTHOR JUST DISAPPEARING IN DIVING DRESS

my head. The lugger had been drifting gently all the time, and a new oyster-bed might have been reached, so I was given the shell-net in case I happened to see something worth picking up, and with final injunctions from the commander to "keep on even keel" while descending, the helmet was closed tight, and I was shut off completely from the outside world. I rested over the gunwale helplessly for some seconds, half-choked by the superabundance of rubber-tainted air within my limited prison, then I revived somewhat, and sidled into the water as gently as I could.

For a brief space I seemed to descend at lightning speed; a blurred vision of green flashed before my eyes; my ears buzzed painfully, and my head felt as if it had suddenly grown too large for the helmet. I had not anticipated these sensations, and would have given much to be safe above once more, but down I had to go whether I would or not. Soon the sighing in my ears became less violent, and it seemed as if my rapid downward course had been considerably checked. The wall of green appeared no longer as a quivering hallucination, and the rhythmic pulsations of the pumps sounded distinctly through the tubing. I felt that all was well again, and was beginning to congratulate myself when I suddenly began to rotate, my feet remaining as a centre, around which my head described an ellipse. After a few moments of this unpleasant kind of performance I did not know which end of me was uppermost, and I gasped and spluttered and perspired profusely; then, after an eternity of time, as it seemed, my head bumped gently against a giant mass of coral, and the shock helped to bring back my senses.

I found it no easy matter to regain the perpendicular, and my head bobbed like a football on the coral bottom for some time before I succeeded in my efforts ; but the sight that met my gaze then was sufficient reward for all my sufferings. I stood in the midst of a magnificent marine forest, where graceful coral branches intertwined with less material tendril growths. Delicate fern-like plants covered the honey-combed, snowy rocks, and enormous Neptune's cups appeared here and there among the clinging vegetation. The fronds of the coral palms trembled as if in a gentle breeze, and the more robust growths swayed slowly to and fro. It was as if a luxurious tropical thicket had been submerged, and yet retained its pristine grace and beauty. My radius of sight was but a few yards, unfortunately ; beyond that all was blurred and indistinct as a picture out of focus. I tried to walk, and at once realized that my limbs would hardly obey my will—the pressure of the water had cramped them so that my movements were like those of an automaton, and this at a depth of less than a hundred feet. Shell-fish of all descriptions were scattered around, and among them I observed a solitary pearl-oyster, and I picked it up as if it were of the rarest value and placed it in the net. With much trouble I also succeeded in breaking off a coral branch. Instead of being brittle to the touch, it proved to have all the tenacity of the willow.

I was preparing to go farther afield in search of treasure when a tug, tug came at the rope encircling my body. I had reached the limit of the line, and the ship was drifting onwards. At the second tug my feet lifted clear of the bottom, and I immediately acquired a horizontal position ; then a deadly faintness

came over me, and I felt myself choking. I jerked wildly at the communicating rope, and in a moment I commenced to shoot upwards, gyrating the while like a spinning minnow. When I reached the surface and was pulled aboard I was more dead than alive, but I was satisfied, nevertheless, to have gone through the ordeal. Mariano surprised me after I had been rescued from the dress by emptying from it several gallons of water.

"Helmet leak," he said. "No keep even keel; get drowned. See?" I did see, and marvelled that I had escaped so easily. I still have the coral branch to remind me of my experience.

Recently I have learned that the crew of the *Rose* mutinied some little while back, and she came into port with neither the diver nor the commander aboard.

A lugger is never anchored while working a patch, for the molluscs are seldom found very closely together, and in consequence the ship is allowed to drift, while the diver follows on, filling his shell-net as he proceeds. If a chasm occurs in the drifting course, the unfortunate below must depend wholly on his grip of the plunger-line to save him, and if a series of giant coral cups or other obstacles bar his way, he must clamber over them as best he can. The enormous length of air-tube curling through the water also needs his close attention, for as the so-called "shallows" are of varying depths, many fathoms of extra tubing are constantly dangling around, and a few seconds' sagging against a sharp rock or coral cup might penetrate the rubber, and—the diver's career is ended. When sailing between two known beds, or prospecting for fresh shell levels, the diver is not brought aboard, but is raised to the gunwale,

where he clutches fast ; and there he hangs, sometimes temporarily fastened by stout ropes to the mast or deck-clamps, until the intervening waters have been crossed and the lugger is again hove to.

The Malays who attend to the air-pumps require to be always under careful supervision. Two of them can rarely work together long without finding something to quarrel about, and then their duty is neglected while they argue or fight over their trivial differences.

I was recently on board the lugger *Dorothy* when at work off Cape Bossut, and while the owner was examining some strange coral specimens in the little cabin aft, I remained on deck to see that the pumps were kept properly manned. All went well for several minutes, and the thudding pistons drove the hissing air down into the writhing tube with unfailing regularity. Then suddenly the pulsations ceased ; the two Malays at the handles clutched at each other's throats in angry altercation, and were immediately rolling over and over on the slippery deck. I sprang to the pumps and succeeded in restarting the flow of air, and the lugger owner, rushing from the cabin, energetically hurled the squabbling men overboard among the multitudinous sea-snakes which surrounded the vessel, where their enmity quickly dissolved. When the diver was hauled to the surface he was unconscious, but soon recovered when the great helmet was unscrewed from his shoulders. Such incidents are not uncommon, and it is certainly surprising that fatalities do not oftener occur.

Broome is the great centre for all pearlers. It is a blistering little settlement, situated on the edge of Roebuck Inlet—a mangrove-lined, salt-water creek, which harbours a most powerful species of mosquito ;



THE PEARLING LUGGER *DOKOTTY*

and the population is approximately made up of fifty whites and five hundred of mixed Polynesian race.

Such a proportion, as may be imagined, is a somewhat dangerous one, and it appears all the more so when it is known that the pearlers' "hotels" are but villainous drinking-saloons, run, alas! by one or two unscrupulous white men.

Details of life in this out-of-the-way township may well be spared the reader. It is one of the hottest corners on the face of the earth, which statement is true in a double sense, thanks to the miserable influence of the renegades mentioned. The master pearler does not visit this quarter any more than he can help; he remains on his schooner while in its vicinity. Association with the men he employs would destroy all his authority over them and lead to certain disaster. The poorer class of pearlers are termed "beach-combers" by their more fortunate fellows. Having lost their boats and diving-gear through stress of weather, or by encountering uncharted rocks, they try to regain sufficient money to begin afresh by searching the beach for any chance shells that may have been washed ashore. Sometimes they set to work with their limited tools, and succeed in constructing various and crude forms of "two-masters" from the wreckage of their former vessels and some roughly-sawn eucalyptus planks. "Cock-roaches" the results are called, and they reflect much credit on the patience and ingenuity of their builders, though they can seldom be trusted any distance from shore, owing to the influx of water through their ever-gaping seams. After a storm the beach-comber reaps a good harvest, and then, if his form of labour be less

dignified, it nevertheless nets him quite as large a return as falls to the lot of the owner of a lugger.

Some very fine men are engaged in the pearling traffic, as well as some of the worst specimens of humanity ; but the former are greatly in the majority, and by them the whole industry is influenced. Lugger owners are, on the whole, kindly and true-hearted people, and the schooner captains the most generously hospitable men I have ever met.

Under the Shadow of the Leopolds

THERE is no more fascinating coast in the whole world than that which forms the sea-board of the mystic Leopold country in North-Western Australia. It is fringed with innumerable islands and indented with magnificent bays and inlets, which for rugged beauty might well compare with the majestic fiords of Norway, whilst the placid waters of a summer sea ripple ceaselessly over coral beds and pulsate through uncharted channels, unchecked by wharves or piers, and unsullied by the flotsam of commerce. Here is, indeed, a region far from the haunts of white men, yet it soon must attract the wandering Briton to its shores, for it abounds in mineral treasure to an exceptional degree, and is merely the border of an immense mountainous tract which is still but a blank space on our maps, but which private explorers and adventurous miners have termed the Golden Land of the Leopolds. Gold and diamonds are known to exist throughout all this dark corner of our great Empire, and its coral deeps have proved to be rich in pearls of the rarest description. What further inducement could man desire?

Yet there is the inevitable deterrent feature of such Eldorados to be reckoned with, and in this case it takes the form of hostile aborigines, who guard their domain jealously against all white intruders, and

import a large element of risk into the fortune-seeker's life in these latitudes.

However, there is comparatively little danger to be feared when journeying by sea along the outskirts of the forbidden land ; and there is probably more to be gained by such an expedition, for the treasures of the shallows, as well as of the shores, may be tapped, and an unrestricted highway for navigation is open for the transmission of results to more civilized parts. The pearling centre of Broome is nearly three hundred miles south of this unmarked coast, and the settlement of Derby, at the foot of King Sound, is almost equally distant from it. Occasionally a lugger may take a northerly cruise, but seldom are the winding inlets explored or exploited ; a wholesome dread of coming to grief on some hidden rock or boulder prevents the usually unskilled steersmen of these craft from doing more pioneering work than is absolutely necessary. So it is that between latitudes 14° and 16° S. only a general knowledge of the northern sea-board has been obtained. Any surveys that have been made are useful only to the theoretical geographer, and the consequence is that the vast north-western division of Australia is probably the least-known area on the face of the earth.

When I arrived back in Broome after my cruise in the *Rose*, the prospects of a ship calling at that port seemed more remote than ever, and my companions and I grew more and more discontented with our lot as the days went by. Indeed, after about a fortnight of unadulterated misery, I proposed to them that we should start and walk towards civilization.

"It's a trifle over seven hundred miles from here to Perth," said Phil, with a questioning smile.

Then Mac added his testimony.

"It's nearer a thoosand," he grunted dismally ;
"an' ye must mind we're no camels."

We were standing on the beach of Roebuck Bay, idly watching the movements of several luggers which were coming up the channel on a full tide, and as we gazed at the trim little schooners, a common thought seemed to arise in our minds, causing us to sigh regretfully. "If we only had a lugger, boys," I said, "we should soon get out of this young Hades."

Just then an oddly-shaped vessel, with higher free-board than the rest, swept in from the sea with all sail set, and came surging up into the creek at an alarming rate.

"That's Gentleman George's boat," exclaimed Phil in amazement. "I wonder what has brought him in here !"

Gentleman George was a well-known individual all over the Westralian coast, and we had met him several times before ; but I knew that he rarely put into Broome unless compelled by stress of weather or some equally urgent reason. "He may have called for stores," I answered musingly, as the strange craft came on, steering a true course between the numerous sand-banks and avoiding the shallows dexterously.

"It's Gentleman George," was the shout that arose from the decks of the more leisurely pearlers, and with helm hard down they veered off to a respectful distance. Truly the latest arrival seemed to cause consternation among the fleet ; each ship dodged and doubled to give him a wide berth, and their frantic manœuvres were amusing to witness.

"He is a reckless deevil," spoke Mac admiringly ;

"but he's bound to come to a sudden end if he doesna adopt mair canny tactic." Then he made a trumpet of his hands and sent a stentorian shout across the waters: "Gentleman George, ahoy!"

Immediately a bare head popped above the gunwale, followed by the beshirted shoulders of a squarely-built man of middle age, as the steersman rose to glare at the signaller.

"Gentleman George, ahoy!" again bellowed Mac.

A light of recognition broke over the face of the daring sailor. "Ahoy, ahoy, ye sand-groping gorilla!" he roared back, at the same time putting his helm across to port and bringing the prow of his clipper round into the wind. A few moments later the *Adventurer*, as the odd lugger was named, was safely anchored some fifty yards from the beach, and her sturdy owner was pulling towards us in his dinghy.

"Couldn't you have struck the coast at a better place than this?" he shouted to me over his shoulder.

"We steered direct from Johanna Spring," I replied; "but if I had thought we were to be stranded here, I would have kept the camels and made a bee-line for Brisbane or Sydney."

The dinghy had now grated on the shingle, and its occupant, leaping out, greeted us warmly. "It's like a glimpse of the old country to see you," he said. "The sun-dried skunks on this coast aren't fit company for a white man."

"Ye're like an Egyptian mummy yersel', my man," reproved Mac severely.

"Ah, well, I shouldn't wonder!" laughed the wiry pioneer. "But we can't kick against circumstances, can we?"

"Might I ask where you are bound for this time?" I put in mildly, by way of digression.

"Heaven knows!" came the prompt reply. "I was thinking of prospecting along the Leopold country——" He broke off abruptly, then gazed at us enquiringly. "Will you come?" he demanded.

With one voice we answered, "We will," and so a compact was made which afterwards was the means of our taking a much longer cruise in the *Adventurer* than we had ever intended. Gentleman George had put into port, as I had guessed, for stores, and these were soon obtained and placed on board. Then we visited the hotel where we had been staying, and made our final arrangements for the journey.

It was late in the afternoon when we embarked, and the various schooner and lugger captains about advised us strongly not to venture seaward before the following morning. But we were anxious to feel the fresh breezes of the Indian Ocean playing on our cheeks; we had had enough of the mosquito-infested swamps and tainted atmosphere of Broome; and, further, I knew that Gentleman George was the most expert navigator in these waters.

The stars were beginning to appear when we weighed anchor and sent the broad lug-sails squirling up aloft like giant bat-wings, and as the gallant little ship gathered speed and pointed her narrow bows out into the vast waste of rippling wavelets, the Southern Cross shone brilliantly over the horizon and gave us a true bearing.

During the night a storm arose, and the *Adventurer* had to fight with the elements for every foot of headway. Still she staggered forward, her lee sail buried in the boiling surf. It was a wild storm for

a pearling lugger to encounter, and I could easily guess how disasters might occur with less skilfully handled vessels; but Gentleman George kept an iron grip on the tiller, and with the knowledge of a seasoned mariner avoided many overwhelming seas which reared their heads angrily on our port quarter, then broke and foamed away by the stern. Daylight came at last; and with the first red streaks of dawn the boisterous winds faded away, and the ocean speedily assumed its wonted placid aspect. Before breakfast was over we were gliding along almost on even keel, with only the gentlest of zephyrs filling the great sails. The storm had completely spent itself, and we were furrowing the bosom of a smiling tropical sea. Away to starboard the rocky cliffs of Dampier Land were plainly visible, and our course was shifted so as to lead closer inshore. Hour after hour we skirted the grim-looking hills which bordered the southern limit of an almost unknown territory; then, as the shades of night were beginning to creep over the fathomless wastes, the *Adventurer's* bowsprit was again pointed seaward, and before the sun had risen on another day we had crossed the entrance to King Sound, and were scudding N.N.E., where, behind a host of silvery isles, the frowning ranges of the distant Leopolds loomed up into misty clouds of rapidly-dispelling ether.

“We’re sailing in uncharted seas now, boys,” said Gentleman George with much satisfaction. “We’re on the edge of the greatest *terra incognita* in the world.”

At noon our position worked out to be but a few minutes under the fifteenth parallel; and after some deliberation we headed eastward through a maze of

stranded coral islets and shaped a careful course along the mainland, steering into narrow straits and cunningly hidden harbours, and now and again making an anchorage that we might examine the many promising quartz-reefs which outcropped in great "blows" immediately on the water's edge.

Days passed in this fashion without much real progress being made ; but our discoveries of certain rare formations occupied our attention so keenly that we were no longer impatient with our surroundings. No more beautiful scenery could be imagined than that which may be viewed in these latitudes. The towering, forest-clad heights, the imposing defiles, the peaceful inland seas, and the majestic splendour of the grim, mouldering cliffs—all were grandly picturesque, and served to impress us strongly, hardened wanderers though we were. A torrid sun blazed down on gently-heaving waters, and reflected gloriously along the wildering hill-slopes ; yet the fierce heat was tempered by the most delightful of cool breezes from beyond the glistening archipelago, and the blue wavelets lapped the pearl-strewn beach in rhythmic harmony.

It was after we had been cruising for nearly two weeks amid these pleasant scenes that our most important find was made, and then we had an opportunity of judging what might have been a very detrimental feature of the lonely land in a more practical manner than we desired. It was about two o'clock in the afternoon of a very hot day when we reached the head of a long, narrow inlet which stretched between two rugged mountain spurs. The entrance to this channel had been made only with great difficulty, for a series of jagged coral

boulders interrupted the passage, and we had to take to the dinghy, and from a position of safety carefully manœuvre the lugger between the obstacles. It seemed as if Nature had purposely barred the way to one of her richest treasure-houses. However, we had arrived at the limit of the water-way without mishap, and were surveying the rich eucalyptus-clad country before us with much delight. Never had I seen so luxurious a vegetation in Australia. Rare mosses and gorgeous flowers extended all over the higher altitudes of the hills, while between the trees ferns of the most lovely description flourished abundantly. And not only this: down through the almost imperceptible valley a sparkling stream of clearest water gurgled and splashed over marble-like terraces of quartz, until it united with the arm of the sea in which the *Adventurer* lay securely anchored. For a long time we gazed around in silence, then our eyes sought the white shelving channel of the creek and there lingered.

“What do you make of it, Phil?” I asked, at length breaking the solemn stillness.

“Auriferous quartz,” he replied laconically.

“Hundreds of tons of it,” supplemented Gentleman George.

“We’ll get oot an’ investigate,” murmured Mac. And out we went.

A rough scrutiny of the exposed matrix proved to us conclusively that the entire bed of the stream was composed of a true gold-bearing formation; but whether it would be payable to work without machinery was another matter. Phil lost no time in preparing a sample for analysis. Taking his prospector’s hammer, he tapped from the edges of the

channel several fair-sized pieces of quartz, and these he commenced to beat into powder, using a broad flat stone as a crushing-press. While he was thus engaged, Mac proceeded to test the alluvial deposits of the broad delta by means of his ever-ready gold-pan, and soon both my companions were "washing" their prospects assiduously.

The lighter sands in Mac's dish were quickly carried off by the overflow ingeniously contrived by that astute individual, and in a few minutes only a small quantity of dark, heavy granules was left in the grooved rim of the basin. As yet no gold had been observed; but on more water being added, and the pan canted obliquely several times, the bulk of the residue slid slowly aside, leaving in its wake a long comet-like streak of glittering metal.

"Got it!" exclaimed the manipulator, triumphantly handing the gold-pan to me for further examination.

"It's a mighty good prospect," said Gentleman George complacently, "and I guess we'll camp here for a bit."

The presence of gold in the reef was now assured, and, judging by the rich nature of the drift, the mother lode must necessarily be of considerably more value. As to this, Phil's analysis of the ore proved our contention to be not far out. Numerous little nuggets and slugs came to light when his sample was treated by the wet process, and an attractive trail of "flour" gold was also in evidence.

"There's a fair sprinkling of these confounded iron pyrites in the stuff," he said, after we had given expression to our delight in rather a noisy fashion; "but that would be nothing if we had a simple amalgamating-vat."

"We'll get that arranged later, boys," interrupted Gentleman George, gazing around apprehensively as a faint crackling broke upon our ears; "meanwhile, the surface wash should be about as much as we can handle."

Again a vague crackling echo was heard; this time it sounded nearer and much more distinct than before. For the moment our gold-mine was forgotten, and we scanned the forest anxiously, not knowing what to expect.

"Might have been a herd of kangaroos," suggested Phil lightly, returning to his work.

"Mair likely niggers," growled Mac. "The black deevils aye come along when they're no wanted."

"I think we's better get abroad, boys," said Gentlemen George meaningly. "I've been on this coast before, and the natives are not so tractable as they are farther south."

Rather reluctantly we started off for the beach, where the dinghy lay half out of the water; but we had not gone a dozen yards when, with a series of demoniacal yells, about a score of stalwart aborigines burst out from among the trees and rushed to intercept us, brandishing spears and kylics in a manner that could not be misunderstood. In our eagerness over our discovery we had neglected to keep a strict lookout, with the result that the crafty natives had almost got between us and the dinghy before our suspicions had been aroused.

"Never mind the boat, boys; swim for the lugger," roared Gentleman George; and a moment later we plunged into the blue water as one man and struck out wildly towards the *Adventurer*, which lay about fifty yards from shore. A shower of spears whizzed

over our heads as we bobbed to the surface, causing us to dive promptly, and when we reappeared a fresh fusillade greeted us, but fortunately fell wide and did no harm. I now got a hasty glimpse of the attacking force, and noticed that they were grouped around the dinghy, gesticulating energetically, apparently arguing the point as to how many of their number it could carry.

"For Heaven's sake screw on your best speed, boys!" adjured Gentleman George, blowing like a grampus, yet burrowing into the foam right manfully.

Our clothing did not impede us much, being of a rather scanty description, for which we were then truly thankful, and we made wonderful progress; but just as we grasped the gunwale of the lugger the sound of oars intimated that our enemies were close in our rear.

"Up anchor, boys," yelled Gentleman George, "while I get the ship's armoury on deck." He disappeared below, and Mac and I strained every nerve at the creaking windlass; but we were floating in nearly ten fathoms of water, and I could plainly see that it was hopeless for us to attempt an escape by flight.

"Get my hunting Winchester from the cabin, Mac," I said, when, after much exertion, only the slack of the cable had been taken in. "We'll have to fight, after all."

He wriggled his bulky form through the after hatchway at once, colliding in his haste with Gentleman George, who was coming up with an armful of miscellaneous rifles and cutlasses, the very sight of which ought to have been enough to frighten off the blacks. Our preparations did not take long to

make, and before the dinghy was twenty yards from the beach we had its numerous occupants covered by artillery which might even have made a fair-sized hole in a modern cruiser. Those of the tribe who could not visit us by sea now scrambled along the sands on both sides of the gully, and made the best of their time by launching sundry spears in our direction.

"I'll give the beggars one chance for life," muttered Gentleman George, standing up in the stern sheets. "They may understand the lingo of their brethren in the south."

He forthwith proceeded to harangue the approaching natives in energetic monosyllabic words, such as no white man but himself could speak. The effect was magical. The rowers dropped their oars and gazed at him in bewilderment, and for a brief space not a sound broke the impressive stillness. Then a roar burst from the lips of the savage boatmen—a strange, half-articulate roar, that was taken up by the dusky aborigines on the beach and echoed and re-echoed over the waters.

I listened in amazement, entirely nonplussed by their odd behaviour, but as my ears became familiar with the repeated cries, I could trace the constantly-recurring words, "Gen'leman George! Gen'leman George!"

"By the great howlin' Billy," roared Mac, "they've recognized our George!"

It was true. Gentleman George's early pioneering journeys had made him known to many of the wandering tribes of the north, and his kindness to black men generally had borne fruit at last.

"We're all right, boys," he said, stepping down

from his perch. "They remember my visit to this coast ten years back, and as I have always acted on the principle of treating a black man square, I don't think we need now be the least afraid."

It was as he said. The blacks have long memories, and in this case we benefited exceedingly by that circumstance. We were permitted to continue our mining operations unmolested; indeed, we gained much assistance from many willing members of the band, so that our stay in their vicinity lengthened out for days and weeks. Then, when the alluvial deposits had been worked out and provisions were getting scarce, Mac, Phil, and I set out in the *Adventurer* bound for Singapore, where we intended to purchase some necessary mining-plant; and Gentleman George remained behind with the natives, whom he trusted implicitly, and there we found him on our return, many months later, worshipped as a king by the most hostile savages of the Australian continent, and by his influence doing a great good to the cause of civilization.

Christmas Island

FAR out in the Indian Ocean, basking in perpetual sunshine, lies Christmas Island, one of the loneliest, yet one of the loveliest, spots in the whole world. Few people are aware of its existence, and fewer know that it is inhabited ; and little wonder, for this remote part of our empire is well out of the track of vessels, and until very recently was not even marked on the map. It rears its palm-covered heights from the depth of a fathomless ocean one thousand miles SSW. of Singapore, and about an equal distance due west from Port Darwin in Northern Australia. In shape it is not unlike an equilateral triangle with sides about eight miles in length, and its contour is as the top of a giant mountain whose greater extent has been submerged. It is bounded by a narrow coral strand over which the bluest of blue waters lap, and beyond this narrow fringe there is not a level stretch to be found throughout the entire limits of the island. Were the sea to be suddenly drained from this quarter of the globe, it is estimated that Christmas Island would stand like a Mount Ararat in the centre of a vast undulating plain.

Many evidences of volcanic disturbance may be noted along its precipitous steeps, and when the eruption of Krakatoa, beyond the Sunda Strait,

buried many thousands of natives in lava showers and blotted out a village completely, Christmas Island was swept with an immense wave which dashed high along its luxuriously-clad shores, and strewed the forests with masses of coral and lava.

No wild animals find shelter among its dense coppices, nor do any reptiles have their home on its shores, excepting a small creature of the snake species, which, however, is absolutely harmless, and, moreover, blind. Red crabs are the one great feature of the island; they swarm everywhere, and, periodically make journeys into the highest points of the mountain-ridge, where they congregate in vast moving armies, and climb along the branches of the succulent sago palms in endless rows. These strange amphibians grow to a great size, some of them measuring as much as nine inches across the back. Their appearance, as may be imagined, is distinctly malevolent, and is certainly not attractive. They burrow at the roots of trees and dig holes in the ground like rabbits. They are most ubiquitous in their habits, and never appear in isolated parties.

Almost every kind of tropical tree is to be found in the great forest which extends all over the island. Cocoa-nut palms grow in profusion along the water's edge, where also banyan-trees and limes flourish abundantly. The sago palm finds root on the upper altitudes along with many other varieties of that prolific family, and the most rare and beautiful flowering orchids blend their radiance with gorgeous fern-like plants and creeping tendril growths unnameable. But one strange tree is found here amid the thick underscrub which never recommends itself to the traveller. It gives forth a most baneful odour,

and taints the air within a radius of several hundred yards of its presence with its harsh perfume. It further has the property of imparting, and, indeed, forcing its disagreeable characteristic on the person of any unfortunate who may touch, even ever so slightly, its stolid, oak-like trunk, and, should its aspen branches brush across the face, a course of carbolic treatment is necessary to eliminate the horrid stench conveyed.

At this island I with my two companions arrived. We had been trying our best to connect with Singapore in a pearling lugger from North-Western Australia, but the elements had proved very adverse, and we were thankful indeed when, driven out of our course by successive squalls, we sighted the towering headland on the eastern edge of the distant isle through the mists. We entered Flying Fish Cove, on the southern face of the island, after searching in vain for a sheltered nook on the north and west, and sailed into this palm-fringed haven with pump broken down, the gunwales dangerously close to the chasing waves, and baling the swirling pools from our labouring craft with every suitable utensil at our disposal.

We found it impossible to obtain an anchorage in the pigmy bay, and while we were cruising about in the dinghy exploring for rocks which might prevent us from safely beaching the lugger, three white men appeared from among the cocoa palms and welcomed us with loud shouts of delight.

“Hold on a minute, boys,” one of them cried. “We’ll soon fix up a mooring for you.”

Two of them ran to the opposite sides of the harbour, where, for the first time, we observed several long coils of rope at the base of two tall

palms ; the third came aboard our vessel and directed operations in person. Within five minutes our boat was made fast by hawsers attached to stem and stern and carried out to the trees mentioned. Then we gladly accepted the invitation of our new-found friends to visit their bungalow, and soon after we were being hospitably entertained by the three white inhabitants of the island, who seemed extraordinarily glad to see us.

"But what on earth are you staying here for?" I asked, when we had partaken of lavish refreshment, surprised that three white men should remain on such a lonely shore.

"We are not so much alone as you think," laughed the youngest of the trio, whose name was Ferrier. "We have about two hundred coolies who dig guano camped close at hand. Don't you smell them?"

"I never could stand the smell o' Chinamen," objected Mac, my late bos'un and crew combined, sniffing the air in disgust.

"We're not over happy in their company just now," observed the eldest of the modern Crusoes. "Are we, Vincent?"

The man addressed as Vincent smiled grimly, and pointed significantly to the rows of firearms standing within easy reach. "Look here, boys," he said, addressing my party, "we happen to be in a pretty tough fix with them hanged niggers just now, and that is one reason why we're so mighty glad you've come. It's Ferrier's funeral, and he'd better explain."

That cheerful individual, who seemed to be the dominant spirit there, took the cue without demur. "In the first place," said he pleasantly, "about fifty of the coolies are down with beri-beri, and they're

dying off a bit too fast for my liking. The fact is, if we cannot stop the disease the whole camp will be wiped out soon."

"But cannot you do something?" I interrupted. "Haven't you got any medicines?"

"We have done our utmost," he replied, "and last night I dissected one of the poor beggars for the purpose of finding out if possible the true cause of the trouble; in consequence, the rest of the camp are in a state of mutiny now, and we daren't go near them."

"You made a very serious mistake," remarked Phil, who knew something about Chinese and their odd beliefs, "if you allowed them to know that you had experimented on one of their number. A coolie's creed is a complicate arrangement, and you have probably outraged it by your action."

This was precisely what had occurred. The low-caste Chinaman sets very little store on his life, but his religion is cherished with a touching faith.

"We'll hope they cool down soon," said Vincent; "but I have had some experience with them already, and they are a treacherous lot."

At that moment Ferrier, who had gone out to knock down some cocoa-nuts, re-entered hastily, "They're coming, boys, they're coming!" he cried, as he quickly barricaded the door; and we silently seized a rifle apiece and crouched down on the earthen floorway.

Then followed a most exciting time. Looking through a chink in the logs of our stronghold, I beheld over a hundred naked coolies approaching through the thick undergrowth, evidently in a wild state of frenzy. When they came near they halted and united in a shrill scream of anger; then they

rushed at the bungalow and battered at its stout walls viciously. They were a wild-looking lot. Some of them brandished long knives and hacked at the barred door with vehemence, others were armed with axes and shovels and staves. Assuredly they meant more than a mere playful demonstration.

"This is a deevil o' a place we've struck," groaned Mac, prospecting warily around for a loophole. Crash! One of the shuttered windows was driven inward by a great stone, which fell with a thud on the floor at our feet. In an instant Phil had levelled his gun through the breach, and before its loud discharge the attacking force fell back, but the seething crowds behind pressed forward in their room.

"For Heaven's sake shoot low, boys!" yelled the energetic Ferrier, who was keeping guard by the door. "If we damage the mad beggars we'll have to answer for it in Singapore."

"It doesn't seem like as if we would ever see Singapore," muttered Vincent, reloading hurriedly.

"This is too one-sided a fecht for my liking," complained Mac, jabbing the barrel of his gun through the broken window as if it carried a bayonet on the end of it. While pursuing these tactics, and successfully beating back the invaders at his quarter, Mac omitted to keep a strict look-out, and one of the enemy, more enterprising than his fellows, watched his chance and seized the punishing weapon, immediately thereafter writhing his greasy yellow head over the window. But the valiant Mac was in no wise disconcerted. "Come awa' in, my man," said he, evading a knife-thrust dexterously and gripping the astonished Celestial by the pigtail, "Come richt in, and mak' yersel' at hame."

"Good for you, Mac!" cried Ferrier, rushing forward. "Now we're safe; let me talk to him," and as Mac's mild-eyed prisoner was hauled summarily through the narrow aperture, Ferrier began to address him in very forceable pidgin English, while at the same time a loud wailing from the besiegers intimated that we had bereft them of one of their ringleaders.

When the clamour without had subsided, Ferrier apparently had succeeded in convincing our captive of the error of his ways.

"You make talkee, talkee; no more fight!" instructed he; and the suave Oriental replied: "Me make velly much talkee, talkee. We tink boat come full more dam Englees doctor!"

"Well, I'm blest!" ejaculated Mac, wiping the perspiration and powder from his forehead. "So we're dam Englees doctors in this funny place; an' have had to fecht for our reputations, too! I consider the inseasonation maist insultin'."

"English customs do not always agree with Chinamen's ideas, Mac," said Phil gravely, "and in this case perhaps the Chinamen are in the right."

Opening the door suddenly, Ferrier and his two companions now stepped out, pushing their peace-maker before them; and soon that wily individual was discoursing fluently to his assembled compatriots, eyeing askantly the while the long whips with which we had armed ourselves. As he spoke the crowd rapidly dwindled away, disappearing back to their homes on the hill-slopes; but I noticed that they dispersed sullenly, and without even tolerable grace. Indeed they scowled most fiercely on us as they passed, but that, as Ferrier said, was a general habit of theirs and meant little.

Later on in the afternoon we visited the coolie settlement, and also entered the rude hospital where the victims of the dread native plague lay in all sorts of attitudes. Little attention was paid to our movements, a circumstance which surprised me considerably after the fierce attack of a few hours before.

"That's the worst of the beggars," explained Vincent, who seemed to be a fiery-tempered personage. "You never know when you've got the right side of them. Probably when you boys go away we shall be annihilated. That's the danger of living on an island like this."

Despite urgent invitations to sleep on shore that night, we preferred to remain on board our leaky craft. It was not so much the prospect of a night attack from the coolies that we feared; but the myriad red crabs which started from every corner of Ferrier's bungalow impressed us most unfavourably. "They would be a deevil o' a lot worse than muskitties," Mac grunted, with a shudder.

"Which reminds me," said Phil, "that there does not seem to be any mosquitoes on this island, and that is strange, considering its latitude."

"The reason is verra ob-vious," quoth Mac sagely, "for how could the poor beasties live here wi' only three white men within a thousand miles? They wad soon dee o' starvation, I'm thinkin'!"

Next morning the sun rose in a cloudless sky, and the beautiful waters of Flying Fish Cove fairly scintillated with darting fish. The shady palms on shore looked calm and peaceful, and the cooing of multitudes of pigeons in the forest echoed softly through the still air. It was a restful scene, and indescribably beautiful. We had promised ourselves a trip to the

top of the island on this day, provided nothing untoward happened to alter our resolution, and we were not long in making ready for the journey. Mac burdened himself with his cherished breech-loader, which was warranted to kill anything up to an elephant that came within range ; Phil carried a long rope to aid descents over rocky bluffs, and I contented myself with my revolver and sextant. When thus armed, Ferrier appeared on the coral beach and signalled us to come ashore for breakfast.

"I'm going with you to-day, boys," he cried over the water. "I want to find the highest point in the mountain, so that we can fix up a signal-staff if necessary."

"That's not a bad idea," I said, as we pulled towards him in the dinghy. "You might manage to intercept ships bound for Batavia if the worst did happen with these coolies."

"I believe in anticipating matters," he returned, with a laugh, "but there's one saving grace on this ocean speck, and that lies in the sago palms ; they could keep us alive for days if we were driven into the mountain."

As we sailed through the placid water I was surprised to notice great numbers of sea-snakes, of very brilliant markings, disporting themselves on the surface ; they were so numerous, indeed, that our boat had literally to plough a channel through them.

"They feel nasty when you go in for a swim," observed Ferrier, noting our disapproving glances, "but they are quite harmless, all the same."

We had now grounded on the pebbles, and, tying the dinghy to a convenient palm, we hied towards the bungalow, which looked very cool in the calm rays

of the morning sun which filtered through the myriad fronds of the enclustering foliage. Certainly it bore no trace of the affray of the day before ; and many of the coolies working near, whom I recognized as having taken part in the attack, smiled benignly on us as we approached, and looked as innocent as so many children.

Ferrier's companions were not a very loquacious couple. They had lived on the island about two years, and knew each other's thoughts so exactly that speech was almost wholly unnecessary.

"Ferrier has the pull on us," said Vincent. "He can talk a mongrel kind of Chinese, and that keeps his tongue going for ever."

"Which is a jolly good thing for you," retorted that gentleman, "or you would have died of sheer melancholy long before this."

Breakfast over, we started out on our voyage of discovery.

"Keep wide of the coolies at the guano diggings," warned Vincent, as we left ; "it wouldn't be good policy to let them see where you go ;" which was logically enough, considering the disturbed state of affairs then existent among them. But Ferrier coolly disregarded the advice.

"You come and see the workings, boys," he said, when we had penetrated the brush a little way. "Since you have struck our little island you may as well be made aware of its resources ; and hang the niggers !"

We steered to the right, and soon emerged on a narrow clearing cut up towards a bluff in the mountain, and in the middle of this channel the tiniest of railways was laid. We traced the pigmy line until it stopped at a kind of quarry in the hillside, and there

several dozens of perspiring coolies were digging leisurely at the guano deposits exposed, and entraining it in Lilliputian wagons for despatch to the water's edge. Everything was worked on the simple haulage system—half a score of coolies pushing up each empty wagon, which descended laden without assistance.

"That's Christmas Island, Limited," said Ferrier briefly. "They send a ship to us once in six months or so, and get the stuff taken to Singapore, where it commands a good price. The island's full of it——"

"Is there any gold?" interrupted Mac.

"Not a speck."

"Let's gang on, then," murmured the discontented one. "Guano disna appeal to me a bit. I thought there micht have been a bit o' gold in the place."

While we were surveying operations the coolies paid not the slightest heed to us, and when our guide addressed them they only scowled in reply.

"They're certainly not pleasant company," spoke Phil, as we proceeded on our march. "I should have a fit of the blues if I were to stay here a week."

Near to the top of the mountain-ridge the trees were less embellished with creeping vegetation, and a path was forced between the tall trunks with comparative ease. Every branch seemed to be alive with pigeons, and Mac brought down a goodly number with his gun before we had gone far; but, observing that his prowess only gave himself greater weight to carry uphill, he desisted, and found interest in chasing the formidable-looking red crabs instead. Occasionally we were almost stifled by the overwhelming odour of the strange tree already mentioned, and which, I be-

lieve, is peculiar to Christmas Island ; then we would traverse a wildering forest of palms, with drooping orchids, in places forming a blaze of splendour overhead.

We reached the summit after an hour's severe exertion, and I calculated roughly that we must have ascended fully a thousand feet. The ridge on which we stood was bare of foliage, and formed a rude and narrow plateau, extending a little way, then dipping to east and west, and from this eminence we could survey the entire coast-line. Underneath, on every side, was a gently-moving expanse of trees and shrubs, descending abruptly to the water, where a white line of foam marked the junction of land and sea ; beyond, the boundless ocean stretched and shimmered into the vast distance.

"I used to climb up here and watch for ships," said Ferrier. "Sometimes I could see one pass far on the horizon making for Sunda Strait."

"But you could never signal them, I'm afraid," I said. "All ships will give this island as wide a berth as possible, for it would be a dangerous obstacle in the night-time or when there are heavy mists on the waters."

"It is a lonely spot," admitted Phil, "and I for one should not care to remain on it long."

We did not trouble to explore farther ; the island was forest-clad from summit to coral strand, and contained no appreciable valleys or water-courses. One indentation only could be seen in its glistening sea-board, and that was the harbour of Flying Fish Cove, where our lugger lay reflecting back the sunlight from her dripping spars and coppered hull.

"A little bit of Christmas Island goes a long way,

boys," I said to my companions; "and we'll make another try for Singapore to-morrow if the coolies don't break out again."

Soon after we retraced our steps, and within half the time it had taken us to ascend we reached the bungalow among the cocoa-nut palms. The coolies in our absence had given no trouble, and their native "medicine man" assured us that the beri-beri was abating, thanks to the drugs administered by the resourceful Ferrier, who had endangered his own life so coolly in the cause of science and humanity. That night we repaired our storm-driven craft, and fixed a whale-back deck of canvas along the forward bows, so that we might have a chance of reaching the shelter of Sunda Strait before being swamped by the waves sweeping over us as formerly.

Next morning we headed out of Flying Fish Cove to the strains of "Rule Britannia," bellowed lustily by the lonely trio on shore, and re-echoed heartily by our entire ship's company, until an outjutting peninsula of palms hid the three white pioneers from view.

Some hours later, when we had rounded the western extremity of the island and were scudding north before a fair breeze, I descried Ferrier on the top of the mountain energetically semaphoring a last good-bye; and there he remained until the gathering haze of ever-lengthening distance enshrouded the lonely isle in a cloud of misty vapours.

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